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W. T. R. Powell.

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ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"FLIRTS AND FLIRTS; OR, A SEASON AT RYDE."

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore;
To one thing constant never;
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into, Hey nonny, nonny."
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

BOOK II.—*continued.*

CHAPTER IX.

"AH, HAD I WIST BEFORE I KISSED, THAT LOVE HAD BEEN SAE ILL TO WIN."

CAPTAIN NORTHWEY did not kill his wife, when he came home, as she had said he would. The yacht he had gone in, and backed heavily, had won the race, and he came home full of coin and glory, and ready to rest upon his laurels. It was rather an agreeable surprise to him than otherwise to find his wife still there, and doing so, he was contented to accept the fact, and ask

no questions. She did not throw herself upon his mercy, as Florence in her youthful hardihood had suggested, but she felt herself ill at ease with him. If she did not care for another man, it had certainly been brought very clearly home to her, that she did not care for her husband ; and besides this, she was unhappy about Percy Gordon. He had never come again ; she had shut herself into her room, and locked the door, prepared to resist all assaults, but Percy Gordon had never come to see her again. She felt at one moment as though she were deserted by him, the beautiful, talented, fascinating man, who had so nearly won her heart, if he had not quite done so ; at another she recalled his sad smile and melancholy eyes, and fancied that she had deserted him, thrown him back upon his stupid, unsympathising, yet lovely wife. Mrs. Northwey was very unhappy, her face grew paler, her eyes more *simpatica*, with deep black lines setting them off below.

She could eat nothing, but she looked prettier than she had ever looked in her life before, yet she did not look well, and Captain Northwey noticed this, and asked what was the matter with her.

"I think I want change," said Katie, languidly. "Ryde is very relaxing, and I always feel tired now, and my head aches. I think I should like to go home for a little —to Fairoaks, I mean."

"Oh, very well, why should not you go? I'll go out in Talboys' yacht again, if you do, and we may as well give up these lodgings. They are confoundedly expensive, and the season is all but over. Go to Fairoaks by all means, it will buck you up a bit, I dare say, and now we are talking of it, it might be as well to go at once, for there is no end of a breeze springing up, and Talboys talked of going out again to-morrow. I said perhaps I'd go with him, and by Jove won't we spin Kafoozelum along at no end of a pace, if this wind keeps

on. Yes, you had certainly better go to-morrow to Fairoaks."

So, when to-morrow came, Mrs. Northwey went to Fairoaks, and Captain Northwey went out again in Talboys' yacht, Kafoozelum, and the world, which had been looking for it, said it was a separation, and so it was, but not in the world's sense. The faithful Mary went with Mrs. Northwey to Fairoaks, but the other servants, who did not belong to her, and were but taken with the house, remained behind in Ryde, and through them it soon came out how Florence Berkeley had been closeted with Mrs. Northwey for a long time on the day before Captain Northwey came back, though Mrs. Northwey had particularly given orders that no one should be admitted, and so all the discredit of this affair was also laid at Florence's door, though how she should be connected with it nobody quite understood. But though they did not at all understand it, they immediately settled in their own

minds that it must be all her doing, and that it was only because her doings were so very wicked, that they could not comprehend them. And, as Major Bolton had told her it would, that visit to Mrs. Northwey, whom the world knew well enough she had never been acquainted with before, did Florence more harm than anything she had done since she came to Ryde.

It happened unfortunately enough too, that the Gordons and Mrs. Northwey both went away on the same day, not in the same steamboat fortunately for themselves, but on the same day unfortunately for the world's opinion of them, and of course all the world could not be expected to know that it was not actually in the same steamer.

"It is really very sad." Even the severe Mrs. Clifford waxed pitiful. "Those two girls started so well, with such good connections, and both so good-looking, not at all deficient in any way too. They might have done anything, and now they

have quite sunk themselves, the eldest going to marry a regular roué, and the youngest connected with everything discreditable that has gone on in this place since she came to it. Though she has not changed herself, I believe it is all her doing that that lovely Mrs. Gordon has turned Catholic; poor thing, how wasted away she looks from what she was, when she came here! My heart quite bleeds for her! And then that wretched Northwey business, Miss Florence Berkeley seems to have been in the thick of that too. I hear she spent the whole of the day, before Captain Northwey came back, with his unhappy little wife. What she was doing, Heaven only knows; but those fast girls will do anything, one never can answer for them. Looking so quiet too, all the time!" exclaimed Mrs. Clifford, rather incoherently.

"They do say," replied her hearer, this time a Mrs. Eyre, a most good-natured woman, but still a gossip of the first water,

like many another otherwise good-natured person (whether man or woman), "they do say Lord and Lady Bulmer have been so shocked about it all, that they would not even see the Gordons before they went away, and that that is the reason why they have gone so suddenly too. But I cannot understand why anyone should refuse to see Mrs. Gordon; she has become a Roman Catholic certainly, but I do not know of anything else she has done, and those priests have a way of getting round people, which it is impossible to withstand. The only plan is just to shut your door in their faces, especially with that Mr. Thornton. I have the greatest terror of that man, I would never even have him introduced to me, somebody wanted to once, but I just turned my back, and walked away without a word. Oh, it is the only plan."

"I thought the youngest Miss Berkeley would change too," began Mrs. Clifford again, "but I suppose she cares too little

about it to do that. She was always going to St. Mary's a little while ago, and now she has quite given it up, tired of it, I suppose. Oh, anything for a little novelty and excitement now a days! that is the way with all the young people of the present day. Poor Sir Henry, even he was quite shocked by her at last, and had to go away, though he had been so much taken with her at first; certainly she is very pretty, and he is sadly fond of flirting with quite young girls, but even he saw he must not do it with her, it was going too far, so he had to leave the place, though he had just come down on purpose to see that yacht race. Oh! did you never see the way she went on with him? it was really too dreadful, brightening up and talking whenever he came near her, though she had not found a word to say to anyone else, not to any of the young men with whom she might have had a little innocent flirtation (oh, Mrs. Clifford!) without anyone's blaming her; but that had no

piquancy for her, I suppose, she is much too fast to care about that. And then walking about with Lord Bellamour, oh ! she is quite shameless. I only pity Lord and Lady Bulmer for having such nieces. Poor Lord Bulmer looks quite ill about this marriage now."

"Will he be there ?"

"Oh dear no, neither he nor Lady Bulmer even speak to the girls now. Very good of them I am sure to let them stay in their house till the wedding, I wonder what sort of thing that will be, you will go to see it, of course ?"

"Yes, shall not you ?"

"That I shall. Everybody will be there. I expect the church will be crowded, and Miss Berkeley will make a lovely bride, though I hear the dress won't be much. She is to have a lace veil, her mother's, though, I believe. What she will do about going away is what I want to see, will she come down the Pier, I wonder ?"

Then they fell to discussing that very interesting topic before every wedding in Ryde; namely, how the newly married couple were to go away. Were they to go down the Pier, the natural and in some cases, at low tide for instance, the only way of leaving Ryde direct for England, thus facing the gaze of curious strangers, and still more curious acquaintance? or were they to adopt the expedient of driving to Cowes, and thence making their way to the mainland *viâ* Southampton, rather a tedious route, for which there is often not time sufficient in the wedding day programme? or what were they to do?

It puzzled Fanny a good deal, and she had not quite decided yet; meanwhile everybody kindly discussed the subject for her, and the young ladies vowed and declared that were they in her place, nothing should induce them to go down the Pier, no nothing, and the young men all agreed with them, but nevertheless they one and all

hoped, that Fanny might decide otherwise, in which case they all promised themselves that they would not be the ones to be off the Pier that day, and thus miss the going away of the 'Season ticket,' an almost more interesting sight than the preliminary giving away of her in church. Who was to give her away they did not discuss, that matter had troubled Fanny not a little, but it was not half so interesting to the world at large, as the question about her manner of departure, that being a reality, and the other only a sham, everyone knowing quite well that fascinating Fan herself, quite of her own accord, and by her own act and deed, did give herself to Major Bolton, and that no one else had anything to do with it at all in reality.

But let us go from the bride expectant to one who was a bride no longer, but only a wife—a wife with a wife's cares. When Florence went to see Evelyn Gordon she was shocked at the change the last few

days had made in her, and it recurred immediately to her mind how Mrs. Northwey had shrieked out, "You want me to save him for you. You love him, and when she is dead, you will marry him—you."

Florence had sworn she would not, and she had thought nothing of Evelyn's dying then, but now when she saw her again, she could not but acknowledge to herself that she looked very death-like. It made her more beautiful, just as looking ill had made Mrs. Northwey more beautiful; they were alike in that, but nevertheless they looked ill in very different ways. Evelyn's colour was richer than usual, her complexion was transparent, her blue veins even bluer than of wont, there was a brilliance in her eyes, and a lovely spirit look about her, such as is never seen but in the beautiful stages of consumption, those stages which only come to some, and to those but for a short time, but which, when they do come, cast such a

charm around the sufferer, as nothing else on earth can equal.

Evelyn looked like a creature for poet or for painter to go mad about, and for those who loved her, and even those, who had not loved her hitherto, to prostrate themselves before, laying down all that they held most precious in life to pleasure her, if but for a single moment. Yet Florence found her lying alone on her low couch, with no companion but a rosary resting lightly in her thin white hands, the beautiful eyes fixed in loving adoration on a crucifix, as though from that alone she expected comfort, and as though she needed comfort sorely. The afternoon sun was streaming into the pretty little sitting-room enhancing her beauty, as it made a golden glory round her head, if looked at from a poetical point of view, but also making the small room very hot and oppressive if looked at in more practical wise.

"I am so glad you have come," cried

Evelyn, laying down the rosary, and holding out both her hands to Florence. "Don't think me very rude not to get up, for I am ordered to lie quite still and rest for our journey to-morrow. I was so afraid you might not be able to come, and I did so want to see you before we started."

"I should have been very sorry not to see you too; but shall I not let down the blinds? This room is very hot, and you look so flushed."

"Yes, I am very hot," said Evelyn, putting up one tiny white hand to her glowing cheek, "and my face is all burning, but the doctor said it would do me good to go south and get plenty of sunshine, and so I thought I would try to get as much sunshine as I could at once, but I don't like it at all, and please shut it out now, for it will make you just as hot as I am."

Florence drew down the blinds, and then came back, and sat down on a low chair beside her.

"But, dear Evelyn, you must not try giving yourself plenty of sunshine in this way, or you will make yourself quite ill. The doctor meant that an altogether warmer and more equable climate than can be had in England would be good for you, but not that you should try to suffocate yourself."

"Did he? You know I never can understand what people mean. Percy always says so, so it is no use trying, and I don't much care if it does suffocate me. It is better to die than to live, don't you think so, Florence?"

"I don't know. Even St. Paul did not seem quite able to decide that point for himself. It depends on what people have to live for, I think."

"I have nothing to live for," said the beautiful vision whom Percy Gordon had made his wife. "Percy was very angry with me for becoming a Catholic. You thought, perhaps, it would make him become one too, did not you, Florence?"

"I thought perhaps it might; but I have always been very sorry I said so, for it was only my idea, and it seems now a mistaken one. But you say he *was* very angry; is he not so any longer?"

"No; he says he does not mind now," said Evelyn sadly. "I don't think he cares enough about me to mind what I do."

"Oh, yes, he does, dear Evelyn, you must not think such things. Percy would, I am sure, mind very much if——"

"If I died, perhaps you think," said Evelyn plaintively, "but I don't think so. I don't understand much, I know I don't, and I can't help being stupid, but I think I know something, and I don't think he would mind much if I died. He will have a good deal of money, just the same, you know. I wish he could have had all, but papa did not arrange it so, and I don't think he would even if I asked him, though papa is very fond of me, but Percy will have a good deal, enough to marry on again when he

wishes, if he can but make up his mind to doing without some things, but that is the question about Percy. I don't know if he ever could make up his mind to do without anything he wanted." She did not speak angrily or complainingly, but as if she had tried to understand his character, and this was one of the peculiarities she thought she had succeeded in making out.

Florence was inexpressibly touched, she looked at this lovely girl, who was younger than herself, and at this time yet more beautiful, having that kind of beauty which throws every other into the shade when brought into juxtaposition with itself, and she thought how Evelyn had given Percy all the love she had to give, and in the unsatisfied longing to gain something, at least something in return, was now giving up life itself, and consoling herself with the reflection that at least she had been the means of leaving Percy in a position to marry any one else comfortably, if only he would be

content to do without something, some few of the little luxuries, which Evelyn herself had never been taught to appreciate by feeling the want of, but which she was slowly learning were held precious by others.

"Evelyn," said Florence, all the harder, because she felt so very sorry for her, "it is very wrong to talk in this way. Every one has some work to do in life, though they may not know exactly what it is, and you must not talk as if you were dying, and going to give up the struggle altogether. You are only a little ill, and you must try to get well, and do your duty. You are Percy's wife, and you must try to be a good wife to him, and you must not talk about dying."

"But I don't think that I am Percy's wife," said Evelyn, very slowly, and without paying any regard to Florence's astonished expression. "You know he had to vow to love and to honour me. I never

did think much about the honouring, because how could he honour me, when I am so stupid? Percy explained to me how it was one day, and how honour had rather a different meaning there to what it generally has. I understood it then, for Percy explains things very well, but I have forgotten now, I am so stupid. I know though, he did explain it, and he said he did honour me, and he hoped he always should; and I hoped so too, but now the other day he owned to me—I knew it quite well before, but the other day he owned it to me, so it is not only my own idea any longer, and it must be true—that he never has loved me. I had been sure of it for a long time, and I did not think about it. I mean," explained poor Evelyn, always truthful, but getting more and more confused, as she went on, "I did not think of it in just that particular way I have been thinking of it lately. You see, Florence, I

shall not use the English Prayer Book any more."

"No," said Florence, fearing that what with the heat of the room, and her troubles, the poor little thing was beginning to wander.

"So as I was putting it away, thinking I would never look at it again, I recollected there was just one part I should like to read over once more, and I read over the marriage service, just that I might see what vows I had taken, because there is nothing wrong in them, is there? No Catholic would think them wrong, and I did take them you see; and whilst I was reading over my own vows, I read his too. You see they come all mixed, or indeed I did not mean to, indeed I did not," and the colour in Evelyn's cheeks grew deeper and deeper crimson, "but I did read them, and then I saw again how he vowed to love me: now if he never has loved me, that is a false vow, you see, and he is perjured. I don't

like to think that, because it sounds so dreadful, but I think it must be so, and false vows cannot be binding, I think. At least, I think—I think they are not vows at all, and then, if there were no vows, I cannot be his wife. Oh, dear! my head aches so, I understood it all quite well before you came in, and now I don't seem to have said it straight, but you do understand me, don't you, Florence?" She had put one white hand up to her forehead again, and now she was sitting up on the sofa, resting her head on her two tiny hands, but looking up at Florence all the time with great earnest gleaming eyes.

"I don't think I do quite—at least I am sure that you are Percy's wife, and you will make yourself quite ill, if you go on talking in this way. I shall have to go away if you excite yourself so much."

"Oh no, don't go, dear Florence, you are so calm and sensible, it soothes me to have you near me. Do you know I often

think you would make just the kind of wife Percy ought to have married, for, though he is so much cleverer, he gets excited, like me, sometimes, and—and I think you would have suited him. Well, perhaps when I am dead he may marry you."

"Never!" exclaimed Florence, passionately. "This room is insufferably hot, I do not know what is the matter with it," and she went quickly to the window, and began hastily to adjust and re-arrange the Venetians.

"I ought to do it for you, Florence, and not let my visitor have all the trouble, but you see, I am told to lie still. I cannot think what is the good of it, when to-morrow I shall not be able to lie down at all, as we shall be travelling all day, and that is said to be for my good too. It seems such different things are good for me, I cannot understand it at all; but then of course it is no use my trying to do that, as Percy says. Then you are sure I am his wife,"

she asked, as Florence came back to her side, "but do you think you understand the reasons I gave you why I am not? I did not give them quite straight, I am afraid, and then I am so bad at giving reasons for anything; but you are so clever—perhaps you understand me. Though Percy is very clever too, cleverer than anybody, and he never can understand my reasons, whenever I give any. Perhaps it is because he is a man, and men don't understand women as well as women do, and I very seldom do give any reasons—indeed I very seldom have any to give. But do you think you understood them just now, dear Florence?"

"Yes, I think I understood what you meant, but you are only puzzling yourself," said Florence caressingly, stooping down and kissing the white blue-veined forehead, that was so hot, it seemed almost to scorch her lips, "and you are Percy's wife, there is no doubt about that, and all you have to do now is to try and be a good wife to him."

"I can never be that," said Evelyn, very calmly again, as if she were but announcing a fact that she felt pretty certain about.

"Every one can be good, if they only try."

"One must not try impossibilities, though," said Evelyn very wisely, shaking her beautiful little head as she spoke, "and though perhaps I may be good some day, for I mean to try very hard, and now I know the right way—yet I never can be a good wife to Percy. I know I never can, so I shall not try that."

"But, Evelyn dear, you ought. You are his wife, and so you cannot be good, unless you are a good wife."

"Then I shall never be good," said Evelyn sadly, fixing her now glowing eyes on the crucifix again. "I cannot be a good wife to him without doing him some good, and the only good thing I can do for him is to die and leave him free—that is the only thing I can do that Percy will think good,

and of course he is the best judge. He will be coming in soon now, Florence, and I ought to rest before he comes in, for he does not like to find me tired, so if you will not think me rude, I think I ought to say good-bye to you now. I don't at all like seeming rude, but when people are not well, they are always having to, that is one of their greatest misfortunes, I think. Good-bye, dear, dear, dear Florence, I love you better than anyone I have seen in England, and I only wish you had been my sister. I am sure you would have made me cleverer, if you had, and then Percy would have liked me better, and we might all have been so happy, but I hope you will be happy still, for I am sure you deserve it. And as you have no home of your own, you do like being with the Bulmers, don't you? I am sure you must, for they both seem so fond of you and Fanny, and Lord Bulmer is always praising you, not that he ever says enough, I think, for I love you so very

much, dear, dear Florence, and I do hope you will become a Catholic too soon. I am sure you will, for you are so good and clever, and Father Thornton will never rest till you are one. Good-bye, good-bye."

Evelyn knew nothing of Fanny's approaching marriage, and of Florence's uncertain future, and somehow Florence had not told her of it; there had been no opening for communicating such news in their strange sad conversation, even if she had cared to communicate it.

Percy Gordon came in, soon after Florence had left his wife; he found Evelyn still very flushed, and he came up to her very tenderly, and stroked her sunny brown hair caressingly, as he asked her if Florence had been to see her, and if they had had a nice long talk. He knew he had treated his wife badly. He did not really care for Mrs. Northwey, or for any other woman, and though he did not care for his wife either, he did not consider that treating her badly,

but he had said things to Mrs. Northwey, which, as he knew, he never would have said to her if he had cared for his wife, and in saying these things he felt that he had wronged his wife. He had been ready at one time to wrong her far more, and in a far worse way than this ; but having been baulked once in his evil purpose by finding Florence Berkeley with Mrs. Northwey, he had never renewed it again. He did not know what Florence was doing there, he could not believe her business there was what it really was, but there was that about Florence, which made it impossible for him to go near Mrs. Northwey again, after Florence had been with her, with the same evil intention as before, and so he had never gone near her at all after that. Still he felt he had wronged his wife by what he already had done.

He had been angry with himself for having done so, and coming home one day in this state of irritation, he had been told by

Evelyn, that without consulting him, or warning him, she had openly joined the Roman Catholic Church, and he had transferred his anger from himself to her, and been really angry with her for the first time in his life. He had told her some home truths, which afterwards he would have given anything to have had unsaid, if only it had been possible; and he had been angry, really angry with her for the first and last time in his life. It was the first time anyone ever had been really angry with her, and poor beautiful stupid Evelyn was scared out of all the senses she had ever possessed; she threw herself at his feet, and clasping his knees, leant her beautiful face against them, and looked up with a look that Percy Gordon never forgot again. It haunted him to his dying day, that wild despairing look, like that of some beautiful animal in its mute appeal for mercy—mercy, but more despairing than that of any mere animal could ever be. If

Evelyn had been frightened before, Percy Gordon was fairly frightened then. He took her up in his arms, and kissed and caressed her, and told her she might be of what religion she liked, and do what she liked, and he would never scold her again, but it seemed all to no purpose, Evelyn only looked at him with mute despairing eyes, and trembled every now-and-then. He almost got angry with her again, it was so dreadful to him that despairing silence, but he did just save himself from that, and was patient with her, wonderfully patient considering his nature. The next day she did not get any better, so he sent for a doctor, and the doctor recommended change of air and scene, and seeing what a fragile creature she was, recommended also that the change should be to a warmer climate. He wanted to stethescope her as well, but the mere idea of it seemed to frighten Evelyn, and for the first time since that dreadful scene between them,

she clung to Percy, and appealed to him to say it was not to be done, and Percy was but too glad to do anything to please her, and so said it should not be done, nothing should be done to her that she did not like, and he would take her to Italy, or wherever else she fancied in the south of Europe, and then he dismissed the doctor, and the idea of Italy reminding Evelyn of their happy voyage to England, and all their many talks about the glories of the old world, she began to cry a little, not passionately, nor even very bitterly, but like a tired, frightened child, and even that was a comfort to Percy, horror though he had of tears in a general way. Still he tried to soothe her, and talked to her of what part of Italy she would like to go to, and Evelyn tried to smile away her tears, and meekly said that every place would be the same to her, if only he were there. Then Percy thought of Rome, and that as his poor little wife had so lately become a

Roman Catholic, she might like to see the head of her branch of the Church, so he suggested this to her, and of course directly he did so, she said she should like that best of anything, and as Percy himself would like Rome very well, and was only longing now to get away from the Isle of Wight, this matter all seemed arranged very satisfactorily, and the only thing that remained to do was to go as soon as possible. This also was soon settled, and then Percy received Fanny's note, and heard of her marriage, and the difficulty about it for the first time; and in his way would have liked to help her, because she was a Berkeley, more than out of any regard for herself individually, but easily persuaded himself, that on his wife's account he would not be justified in remaining in Ryde any longer than was absolutely necessary; so after much deliberation he wrote Fanny the note, which she had afterwards shown to Florence, declining to do the service that had been asked of him.

Percy was very anxious to be kind to his wife now, and so directly she expressed a wish for it, he put in the postscript about Florence, though it gave him not a little pain to do so. He did not know what Evelyn might not tell Florence, and he could not be by, to be any restraint upon her, for he dared not face Florence. Yes, it had come to that now; he had resolved not to see her, for fear the alteration in her should be too painful, and now he dared not see her. It was only because of this that he had invented business for that afternoon, and when he went out and left Evelyn alone, as Florence had afterwards found her, it was not because he was not careful of her now. No, he meant to neglect her no more, and already he was very tender of her, for her look that day had frightened him, and he could not forget it. Evelyn was a puzzle to him now, she no longer overwhelmed him with caresses, and she never spoke to him, unless he first spoke

to her, and even then very timidly, but she always smiled when he came near her, and she received his caresses very sweetly, and was very loving in all her pretty little ways, not at all assuming to herself the character of an injured wife. Percy Gordon could not understand her at all, but he was all the gentler to her for that, and tried hard to rouse her, and make her talk, working at that difficult task with a perseverance that at all events did himself great credit, though, alas! it had no other result, for Evelyn could not talk to him, so as she herself would have said "it was no use trying."

Now he asked her if she had had a nice long talk, and Evelyn smiled very sweetly, and stroked lovingly the hand that was not playing with her hair, and said: "Yes, thank you, a very nice long talk."

Then Percy asked her if she had heard anything about Fanny's marriage, more for

want of something to ask, than because he was interested in this particular subject.

"Is Fanny going to be married? you never told me. No, Florence said nothing about it."

"Oh I suppose it does not interest her much, she and Fanny never used to be great friends. Did I not tell you about it? I thought I had. Fanny told me herself in that note she wrote me the other day, she wanted me to give her away, as Lord Bulmer won't countenance the marriage."

"And did you?" asked Evelyn.

"No, my sweet, it has not taken place yet, and we are going away, so of course I had to say I was very sorry, but I could not."

"You could not," repeated Evelyn. She was very much afraid of saying something wrong, for she saw Percy was beginning to look impatient with her, so she thought that safest.

"No, my dearest, don't you understand—"

"I can't understand anything," broke in Evelyn, her large eyes already beginning to fill with tears.

No wonder Percy was in despair, but he was very patient with her.

"Yes, you can, dearest, you can understand that I cannot possibly give Fanny away here in Ryde next Tuesday, and at the same time be travelling with you to Rome, and it would not do to put off that. Now you can understand that, can't you?"

"Yes, thank you, Percy, you always make things so clear, but—but why should not we put off going away for a little? Please don't be angry with me, please don't," as she saw his look of vexation.

"I am not in the least angry, and you must not get into the way of always fancying I am angry, Evelyn. The reason why we must not put off going away is because we have made all our arrangements to g

at once, and because it would not be good for somebody whose health is very precious —far too precious to be trifled with in that way."

Then Evelyn looked up at him with her dark lustrous eyes, she understood him quite well this time, but her eyes spoke as plainly as eyes could speak, "That is all nonsense, Percy, and you should not say it to me," only they said it very sorrowfully, far more sorrowfully than lips ever could.

Then Percy fell on his knees beside her, and kissed her, while the tears welled forth from his eyes now. His heart smote him for this beautiful young creature whom he did not love, and who loved him passing well, and knew he did not love her, and yet bore him no malice for his want of love. He was nearer loving Evelyn then than he had ever been before, and he kissed her all over, burning face and cold little hands, as though his kisses should prove the truth of his last words, and then Evelyn put her

arms about his neck, and said, "Percy, when I die, will you marry Florence Berkeley?" and Percy cried, "Never," and starting up, tore himself from her arms, and hurried from the room.

"They must be stupid too a little, though they are so clever," thought poor Evelyn, "for they both say 'Never,' and yet I am sure it would be for their happiness, and I think I must be right about that at least, for I love Percy so much that I must know what is best for him, I think, though I am so stupid."

Then she took up the rosary she had laid aside when he came in, and began to tell her beads again.

CHAPTER X.

NEC TEMPORIS ACTI IMMEMOR.

When Lord Bulmer was so very cool to Florence on the day of her coming of age, he was very far from intending never to see her again, as she had supposed; he was very much displeased with her, even more displeased with her than he was with Fanny, because he had a higher opinion of Florence, and because though she was not herself doing anything wrong, he could not see what there was in her case to blind her to what he considered the culpable imprudence of Fanny's marriage. "There must be something wrong about the girl, though I

have never been able to find it out," he thought sorrowfully to himself. She had got herself cut in Ryde, at least as much cut as a girl could be, who was always free to go about with Lady Bulmer, whenever she cared to go anywhere, and now she seemed to think it not only tolerable, but even a matter for rejoicing that her sister was going to marry Major Bolton, a man of whom Lord Bulmer entertained the worst possible opinion. Lord Bulmer did not endow Major Bolton in the mental picture he drew of him for his own private edification, as we all take mental pictures of our acquaintance more or less filled up according to the degree of interest in themselves, with which they have succeeded in inspiring us; Lord Bulmer did not endow Major Bolton with any of those good qualities which Fanny attributed to her lover, he saw in him a man, who had decidedly lived faster than most men, if he were not, as Lord Bulmer rather suspected

him of being, a confirmed *roué*, a man who had small means, no expectations, and many wants, consequently a man who relied much upon cards and billiards, those most uncertain means of livelihood, a man also who had a bad word for everybody, and the worst language to express his opinions in of any man of his acquaintance, finally and once for all, a man who was most specially an object of dislike to the smooth-spoken, steady-going respectable Lord Bulmer.

As has been before said, in a general way Lord Bulmer gave up the charge of his wards, as a matter of course and without any pain to himself, directly he saw them about to get into any real trouble, but he could not wash his hands of either of the Berkeleys without many twinges. He foresaw every sort of future misery for Fanny, if she persisted in marrying Major Bolton, and of annoyance to himself from the near relationship, and consequent claim; the

bare idea of it deepened the furrows in his face, and whitened a few additional hairs. He was determined to prevent it at any cost, and finding neither persuasions nor commands of any avail, had thought out a plan, which, though a most disagreeable one to carry out, seemed to him pretty certain of success. After he had carried out that plan, he would forgive the two girls again, and act once more the part of father to them, leaving them free to go and pay any visits that they liked, only with the understanding that his house was still to be their home; but notwithstanding these intentions it did pain and astonish Lord Bulmer not a little, to find Florence so very resolute in preferring her sister's friendship to his own.

"She never used to care much for Fanny, and Fanny can be of no use to her, which I could be; what can it be that blinds her then to Major Bolton's faults? There must be something wrong somewhere. I

will seem very angry for a time ; indeed, I am very angry, there will not be any need for seeming, and then thinking they have to shift for themselves, they will lay their plans, and I shall watch, and shall soon find out what is wrong, for something must be." This was what Lord Bulmer had thought, and he had waited, and watched, but up to this time he had found out nothing, but only that his certain plan of stopping the wedding was more difficult of execution than he had thought it to be. He began to be uneasy, but there was nothing else that could stop it, so he persevered in his plan, though it was an unpleasant one, and more difficult to carry out than he had at all anticipated.

Lady Bulmer meanwhile was most genuinely and unaffectedly angry. That Fanny, " who might have married anybody from a Duke downwards, should take up with a man like Major Bolton," was too vexatious ; nevertheless her chief indignation

was against Florence. Florence did not attract troops of young men, as Fanny had done, or make herself in any way useful towards contributing amusement for Lady Bulmer, yet she was undeniably at this present time more beautiful than Fanny, and men thought her so. That had long been an annoyance to Lady Bulmer. Besides this, she disliked Florence for being better than herself, having an idea that Florence being, as Lady Bulmer often called her, a little saint, must necessarily despise herself. In addition to this, Florence was to a certain extent cut ; now it is not pleasant to anyone to chaperone a girl in such a position, but to Lady Bulmer, who was fond herself of doing doubtful things, and who liked to be talked of—to a certain extent—it was wormwood. It had occasionally flitted through her mind, that she herself might be cut some day, and she had considered within herself what it would be like, and the prospect had seemed unutterably

dreary. Now, taking about Florence in that position, was next door to being cut herself, and kept continually reminding her of what might be her own fate, if she did not take warning in time. Consequent upon all this she thoroughly disliked Florence, and would have done a good deal to rid herself of her companionship. 'For her part, she never could see why they were to be burdened with the Berkeleys for ever, Fanny had been all very well, but Florence was quite different.' Then came Fanny's astonishing engagement, and Lady Bulmer lost all patience with her too ; but still she was most angry with Florence. Fanny might have the excuse of being in love, but Florence had not that excuse, nor any other in Lady Bulmer's eyes, yet still she would persist in saying she was glad of the engagement, and would not join with the Bulmers in threatening to hold aloof from Fanny for ever afterwards, if she attempted to carry out such a mad and impracticable scheme.

So the two Berkeleys lived by themselves, seeing nothing of either of the Bulmers, and knowing that they were only on sufferance in their house till the Tuesday appointed for the wedding should arrive. It was very near now, and Fanny went out for long *tête-à-tête* walks with Major Bolton, to discuss things, as they said, and they were both very indignant at the Bulmers' ill-treatment of Florence, but Harry Bolton took it more quietly than Fanny did.

"It will never hold out," he said, "Lord Bulmer only pretends to be so angry, because he is so much afraid of relenting, and before we are on the high seas he will have made it up with Florence, and then she will never be so tied down to living with them, as she might have been, had there not been this little *fracas*, and that will be all the better for her, for it is not the best house for a girl to be in, and she will never get on with Lady Bulmer."

"No; Cousin Mary and Florence! one

cannot fancy it," said Fanny, with a short laugh. Somehow that house had been her home for a long time, and she did not relish hearing that it was not a good one for a girl to be in, though she thought so herself.

"Cousin Mary is—" Major Bolton stopped himself just in time, "a little bit of a fool. Florence will do much better with those Domvilles, whom she talks of, and who seem to be so fond of her, or even with Mrs. Cholmondeley. But now, Fanny, about that—" and then they went off to their own subjects.

Whilst these two talked together in the pleasant country roads, Florence sat at home alone, and had plenty of time for thought, and her thoughts were not very agreeable ones. She thought of Fanny and Major Bolton, and those were her pleasantest thoughts, but even those were not very pleasant. She had tried to like Major Bolton, and to a certain extent she had succeeded, but she could not altogether do so.

There was a fast tone about him, that was very distasteful to her, and though she believed Fanny thought so, and had fully meant all that she had said about him, she could not feel sure herself that he was a good man. And even were he a good man, how were he and Fanny to get on with what money they would have, and such a load of debt as they would start with? Florence shuddered when she thought of it. Could it be altogether right, too, for them to take their pleasure, and marry, and go abroad rejoicing at the thought of how they were thus escaping the reach of the law, while their creditors were left unpaid to fight out the hard battle of life as they could, at home! To Florence it was a matter of course that unpaid creditors should have a hard time of it, happily in real life it is not always so, and in such cases as Major Bolton's, the unpaid creditors were as likely to be living in metaphorical clover, as leading any other kind of life. Happily I say, and

yet I am not so sure about that adjective. In Arcadia it would not be so, but then in Arcadia to be sure there never would be any unpaid creditors. To Florence it seemed that it must be wrong, and yet was there not a better chance, if in such a case there could be any better chance, of Major Bolton's some day paying off his debts with the assistance of Fanny's three hundred a year, than without it? and he could hardly be expected to stay in England when he had got it, and give himself quietly up to suffer the rigours of the law, which also would not benefit his creditors very much.

Then besides this marriage, which after all was not all *couleur de rose* even to Florence, she had many thoughts about the Gordons. For long hours would she sit, apparently working, getting on with her work too pretty fast, but really all the time deep in thought as to how long Percy's patience could last, and what would become of Evelyn, if she quite tired him out. Poor

Evelyn! poor Percy! it was but sad work thinking of them. Two such ill-suited people never could be happy together, the best to hope for them was that they might not make each other very miserable, and then ever and again would recur to Florence what she had first begun to dread in that last interview, that some day Evelyn's senses might altogether fail her. It came into her head every now and then, but she could not bear to dwell on that idea, and then naturally her thoughts went from the Gordons to the Northweys, and again she vexed her mind unnecessarily. She had heard nothing really about them since that one day on which she had seen Mrs. Northwey, and carried her point with her, and like the rest of Ryde, she believed that there had been a separation, for she had no reason to think otherwise, and she shuddered as she pictured to herself the miserable scenes that might have taken place first between that big, coarse, cruel-looking man, and his

silly, highly-wrought, sensitive little wife. As to her own future, she did not trouble herself much about that, she would go with Mrs. Cholmondeley to London first, and see the poor woman comfortably established in her widowed home, and then she would go and stay with the Domvilles, and by that time she would have been able to see whether there was any particular call for her anywhere, and if not, surely then she had best go into a sisterhood. She had always wished to do that, and her prospect seemed to her a quite sufficiently bright one; she had worked off those religious doubts by this time, which in some minds go on fermenting for years, and in others come to a head at once, and now her mind was at rest again. Still, the settling being yet so recent, she was afraid of its being disturbed once more, and this made her stay more at home, and away from Mrs. Cholmondeley's, than she otherwise would have done, for she dreaded meeting Mr. Thornton there. At

last, on the day before the wedding, she had to go to make final arrangements for the departure on the next day, and having chosen the time when she thought Mr. Thornton was least likely to be there, she went up to Mrs. Cholmondeley's lodgings, but the fates were unpropitious to her, or propitious to him, and before she had completed her arrangements, he came in.

He had only come in order to say goodbye to Mrs. Cholmondeley, but he had been thinking a good deal of Florence Berkeley on his way there. Were they not going away together next day? and had he been true to his vow, and left not a stone unturned to convert his old love? His old love! oh, what a mockery is there in that expression, telling in light careless fashion whole histories of feelings unspeakable and incomprehensible!

Now Father Thornton seized his last remaining opportunity, and with all the overzealous unfairness and want of taste of a

convert, used every argument that talent or tact could suggest to win the unwilling girl over to what he believed to be the "one true faith, outside of which there is no salvation." How he set about doing so, it would be impossible for me to relate, even were this a fitting place, impossible indeed for anyone to relate, for there was an eloquence in Mr. Thornton's looks and tones even beyond the eloquence in his spoken words. Florence's brain whirled; as to being outmatched in argument, that was no word for it. All that he said seemed to her then indisputable, unanswerable, the English Church had not a leg to stand upon, and it was but the wilful wickedness of some men, and stupid obstinacy of others, that kept it standing at all.

Mrs. Cholmondeley sat by with clasped hands and eager eyes, that seemed to say, "Well, Florence, what have you to say for yourself now?" and Florence had nothing to say for herself. Father Thornton pressed her

to answer something at least, he pleaded with her, said it was unworthy of her, not like herself not to own that she was in the wrong when she was convinced of it, and still Florence answered nothing. At last—hear it, oh ye supporters of woman's right to the franchise, and ye who assert that woman's mind is the same as man's but for the difference of education—at last Florence answered nothing, but only stood up and burst into tears.

"Florence, my dear Florence," cried Cyril Thornton, and laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder, as he had often done when she was a child, and forgot for the moment he was a priest, remembering only he was a man.

"Don't—don't be kind to me," said Florence, choking back her sobs, "you will only make me worse, and I can't help it. All that you say cannot be true, or you could never have believed just the contrary for so many years yourself. I cannot see

the flaw in your argument now, but I know there must be one, for you make it all so perfectly simple and easy, that no one could fail to agree with you if what you say were true; and though I cannot explain it, and that is what makes me so miserable, I know you are wrong and I am right; and Mr. Thornton, I want you to understand, please, that I belong to the English branch of the Holy Catholic Church, and that I am not looking about for a religion. I am afraid I was once, and that is your excuse for all that you have just been saying to me, but I am quite satisfied now, quite—quite with my Mother Church, and for the future I must ask you to find no more fault with it, but to respect my religion, as I will then try to respect yours."

Though rather incoherent they were not senseless words, and it was only to be regretted that they had not been spoken sooner, but whether the words were sensible or not, the tears and flight with which they

were accompanied could hardly be called so, and seemed greatly out of character with Florence's usual composed bearing.

Cyril Thornton did not tarry long behind her, he might soon have been seen striding out into the country with the step of a man who, whether or no he had some much desired haven of rest in view, was certainly in haste to put a considerable distance between himself and some other place, and thus leave it behind him for ever and a day. But he did not leave it behind him, fast and manfully though he stepped out, and after a while he returned back to Ryde. For one moment he had forgotten he was a priest, a character which he had assumed but lately in comparison, and remembered only that he was a man, and that Florence Berkeley was the one girl he had ever loved, and for whom his feelings had never altered. Yes, he had realised it then, though he was a priest, and such feelings had now become sinful for him. They had been innocent

once, and he knew they were his still, just the same as they had ever been ; he realised it all in that fatal moment when Florence Berkeley burst into tears and he laid his hand upon her shoulder, saying, " Florence, my dear Florence," forgetting for an instant that he was a priest, and remembering only he was a man. Such a forgetting and such a remembering were not easy to leave behind, though he did step out manfully into the shady winding lanes with their pretty little glimpses every here and there of the sparkling sea, and Portsmouth with its white houses, and the far away opposite coast vanishing into a pale blue, and finally imperceptible distance. He left nothing behind him for all his stepping out, and by degrees he saw how fruitless it was, and he turned back again to Ryde.

That night he dined out at a regular " Catholic" dinner party, and after dinner and all the dinner talk, which sounded to him as things sound to men in dreams, he was

awakened back into real life by a brother priest sitting down at the piano, and singing that most touchingly beautiful of modern songs, "When Sparrows Build." It was a fat, smiling, fair-faced priest who sang it, but he put feeling into the song somehow, though where he got it from Heaven only knows; and when he came to those last two lines, "Perhaps I shall meet thee, and know thee again when the sea gives up her dead," Cyril Thornton could bear no more, and pleading urgent business to be seen to at home, abruptly left the party. He could not sit by to hear his brother priests singing "Kathleen Mavourneen," and those other pathetic love songs, such as Romish priests delight in, trifling with the feelings they themselves must never know in earnest.

Cyril Thornton, who had felt these feelings himself, and must never feel them again, never now, or woe betide him, could yet listen to these songs on some nights, and admire them with decorous drawing-

room admiration, but he could not sit by while his brother priests sang them now. He went home a miserable humbled man, and knelt before his picture of the Madonna, the mistress of his devotions, spending the long hours of the night in prayer. Next day he confessed his sin, greatly magnified by this time in his excited imagination, and received a proportionate penance, yet not at all proportionate to his passionate desire of self-torture, and he inflicted on himself additional penance, and his sermons grew more fervid daily, stirring up his hearers wonderfully, and his converts grew more numerous.

Day by day did, one after another, pretty behatted and befeathered girls with veils, that revealed rather than concealed, knock at the priest's door and ask when Father Thornton would be able to spare time for an interview, and that time was not very easy to be found, for Father Thornton never hurried anyone away, and old men

are not the only people in the world, who are apt to be garrulous, when they find a patient listener. Father Thornton was very patient, and very earnest, pleading very lovingly with each one of them in turn, and there were more of them, than any one of the number would quite have cared to know, for each one thought the world, if not coming to an end, was at least coming to a crisis, since she felt called upon to abandon the Church of her native land; and when the interview was ended, and the pretty penitent, sometimes also a penitent who was not pretty (there were *some* of all kinds and sexes, only most were of one kind) would fall on her knees asking the good Father to give her his blessing, then Father Thornton's hand would sometimes linger a little on the soft shining hair, sending a thrill through the heart of the girl, just enough of one to have made her indignant in the denial of the weakness, had any one charged her with it, but yet never sending

any thrill through his own heart, for he had doomed his heart to be dead henceforward, and there was only one girl's voice, and one girl's hair, that had ever really moved it to beat faster. Her he had vowed to obliterate from the tablets of his memory, and it was no thought of anything, but winning fresh converts to the faith, that induced him to suffer his hand to linger on the girlish heads, that bowed before him, but it answered just as everything he did with this purpose answered, and all Ryde was in a ferment, for no one could tell, who would go next, and those who were as yet unshaken shunned Father Thornton, as a pestilence, whilst the others followed him, and sought him out at seasonable and unseasonable times, and wrote him delicately perfumed little notes, beginning "Dearest Father Confessor," and finishing "Your devoted," just to tell him how they had been thinking ever since of what he had told them the last time,—these were the

young ladies of course, and Father Thornton crumpled up the tiny scented notes, and thought not a little disdainfully that they were very much like love letters, only of course he was a priest, and so they could not be, but not the less wrote back very pretty little notes in answer to the fair writers. Oh, the end sanctifies the means, and everything is right to gain converts, why shrink from a little spiritual flirtation?

Still Father Thornton did shrink from it, perhaps because he was a gentleman, and had been such so much longer than he had been a Romanist priest, and not seldom he wished all the young ladies at Jericho, or in a yet more miserable mood, wished himself there, and thus at least safe out of their reach. He was a very successful man, all his brother priests thought, and though they tried not to, for they wished to do right, poor men, they envied him not a little, whilst striving to take a lesson from

him, and however humbly follow in his steps; and yet though trying not to be so, they were jealous of him not a little, for only he himself and his confessor knew how very miserable a man was Cyril Thornton the much bepraised.

CHAPTER XI.

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP 'TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP."

It was Tuesday morning, the Tuesday when Fanny Berkeley was to become Fanny Bolton, and 'fascinating Fan' was sitting before the glass artfully arranging her own fair locks, (Lady Bulmer's Thérèse had politely offered her services, but they had been equally politely declined), and Florence was sitting at a little distance contemplating her sister, and quietly waiting to be useful, as occasion offered, when the rejected Thérèse herself humbly knocked at the door again, this time bringing a note.

Bidden to come in, she did so, and presented it to Fanny, who with both hands full of fine-spun gold, requested Florence to open it, and read it to her.

"What can it be about?—it is from Harry, I see. You may go, Thérèse."

Thérèse went, and Florence breaking the seal, read aloud the contents of the note:

"DEAREST FAN,

"The game is up, two men are hovering about the door, into whose clutches I must fall, directly I attempt to stir out. It is a little matter of eight hundred pounds, so I am up a taller tree than any I looked for. Take it easy if you can, and hope for the best.

"Yours always,

"HARRY BOLTON."

She read the note slowly, hardly understanding the meaning of the words; indeed she did not fully do so, till looking up, she

saw her sister's face colourless utterly, and with wild dilated eyes.

"Fanny, my dearest Fanny," and she threw her arms round her sister, and kissed her cold white forehead.

"Give it to me, give it to me," gasped Fanny, but when she had got the note into her own hands, she still seemed unable to read it.

"Can't we draw out as much money as that?" suggested Florence.

"Oh, Florence, when you know my money is only paid quarterly, all except that wretched hundred pounds, which I have the same as you, and that I have overdrawn and overdrawn till—" Fanny burst into a long hysterical sob. "Oh, Harry, Harry, what must he be feeling now!"

But Florence could not pause to consider what Major Bolton might be feeling now; she could think of nothing but Fanny's sorrow, Fanny, who was to have been so

happy to-day, and who was now more miserable than Florence had ever seen her before.

"But couldn't I—Uncle Henry! surely he would help you now."

"Oh, Florence, do you think you could ask him? he might perhaps for you, you always were his favourite," and Fanny did not actually tear her hair, but she threw it back off her face with a gesture that would have recalled the Mœnads to any classical scholar, or even to a connoisseur in Etruscan pottery, as she began pacing the room with long desperate steps.

"I will go and try. Be patient, Fanny, and hope for the best," said Florence, unconsciously quoting Major Bolton's words. "I will try my best."

Her heart failed her somewhat, as she reached the library door, where she knew Lord Bulmer would be found at this hour of the morning, but she could not shrink back with the recollection of Fanny's

misery, still so fresh in her memory, so she knocked at the door, and then boldly walked in. "Uncle Henry, I have come to ask a very great kindness of you."

"Well, my dear!" Lord Bulmer turned round in his arm-chair, knocking down some of his papers, as he did so. How little she thought with what impatience he had been awaiting her!

"Major Bolton has been arrested for debt—at least the men are here to arrest him. I have come to ask you to advance him some money. Though you have always opposed the marriage, you cannot have wished it to be put a stop to in such a dreadful manner."

"In that or any way I think your sister well out of marrying Major Bolton," said Lord Bulmer gravely.

Then a burning colour came into Florence's usually pale face, and she clasped her hands tightly together, as was her way when anything excited her. "Uncle Henry, I can-

not discuss the subject with you now, even if you would. I cannot talk about it while Fanny is nearly mad with wretchedness, but I *do* entreat you, Uncle Henry, if you have ever cared for either of us, or for our mother, or anybody, do, do, save Major Bolton from being arrested. Do, Uncle Henry!" and Florence fell on her knees before him with upturned eyes, parted lips, and tight-clasped hands, a perfect picture of prayer.

Lord Bulmer thought her a very perfect picture, and the beauty of it seemed to melt the hardness of his heart, though at the same time to make him somewhat uncomfortable. "My dear Florence, pray don't; my dear, get up, please. Let me beg of you not to talk in this way. I will—I will do what you want—though as to advancing, it is a mere gift, nothing less; but I will give Major Bolton whatever is necessary—yes, that I will, readily—on one condition."

"On what condition, Uncle Henry?"

She was standing again now, still with clasped hands, but looking down on him now, white as marble too, for Florence had an instinctive horror of conditions.

"On condition that Fanny will promise *never* to marry him."

"This is trifling," said Florence loftily. "You know that Fanny would never give any such promise."

"Then I must decline to oblige you, I fear," said Lord Bulmer, and turning away he began getting together and re-arranging his papers, as if the matter were now ended.

"It is cruel, cruel," cried Florence "you have admitted you could do it. I know you could do it easily, and yet you will allow Fanny's heart to be broken rather than—rather than—"

"My dear Florence, it is because I wish to do all in my power to save Fanny's heart from being broken, that I have taken measures most repulsive to my nature, and now

that they have been so far successful, it is not at all likely that I shall render them useless by paying Major Bolton's debts for him without exacting any promise—to ensure Fanny's happiness."

"Do you mean, Uncle Henry, that it is in any way owing to you that these men have come down here to-day?"

Florence's eyes dilated, and with one hand she almost shook the chair on which Lord Bulmer was sitting. He shrunk before her gaze. "If Fanny will only promise, I will get rid of them directly," he said.

Florence gave him one long searching glance. "I shall never forget this of you, Uncle Henry, never," and so saying she left the room.

She did not pause for a moment to consider now, but quickly ran up stairs, opened her desk, sat down and wrote rapidly a few words, then putting on hat and jacket, hurried out. In a few minutes she was back in Fanny's room again, and pushing

into her hands a bundle of notes and gold. "There, Fanny, it is all right now, you see, so don't dawdle any more. You have only got to send this to Major Bolton now, and you are not to say anything about it to Uncle Henry."

Fanny stared at her, and slowly raised herself up from the bed on which she had thrown herself in her misery, with her face buried among the pillows.

"Florence, oh my dear Florence," and this time it was she who flung her arms round Florence and kissed her. "But how kind, how very kind of Uncle Henry! he really is the dearest old uncle in the world, and must I not even thank him? Oh! but he is too good. I must make haste though, to send all this money off to Harry; what a relief it will be to him, dear, dear Harry! Do you mind, dear Florence, going and asking Newton to take it? I should be afraid to trust any ordinary messenger with so much, and I must write a line to Harry."

Florence went to speak to Newton, and Fanny wrote a few ecstatic lines, and then the money was sent off, and Florence came back to hurry her sister, and help her to bathe the eyes, that were not a little red and swollen, until at last all the wedding finery was put on, and fascinating Fan appeared a bride complete. Then Florence went to put on her own quieter finery, and do the odds and ends that yet remained to do, and Fanny was left alone to meditate, if she were so disposed, during the fast fleeting remaining moments of her maiden life.

A very good-for-nothing younger brother of Lord Bulmer's had been cajoled into doing the giving away, more bribed by the pleasure of annoying his elder brother—always a satisfaction to this ne'er-do-weel, who knew the estate was not entailed, and would never come to himself—than by any other pleasure he expected to derive from the performance of this duty to society. He was now in waiting with a carriage, and

had been for some time, so the two sisters hastened to go down to him, though they had not yet had time for more than broken exclamations, since the terribly exciting money transactions of the morning, and were so soon to part, "it might be for years, or it might be for ever."

Crowded, indeed, was the church when the Hon. Peregrine Portle arrived at the door with his fair charge, and tried to make a pathway for the bride and her sister up the middle aisle. It was difficult indeed to believe that it was a church; people were standing on the seats, talking and laughing, well dressed people and dirty school children, regular attendants, who never missed a service of any kind, and men who did not well remember the last time they had been in a church, all gathered together to see that everything was correctly done, and the Season Ticket duly disposed of for life. There was wicked old Lord Bellamour in his St. James's Street get up, ogling and

peering about, while next to him was one of Fanny's rejecteds, having a try at the Fox and Grapes business, and next to him again good-natured Mrs. Eyre, who had hardly had time to get through breakfast and housekeeping since the early service, and next to her again a whole train of dirty school children, and so on, and so on all through the church, only, an unusual circumstance this at weddings, on this occasion the men predominated. Indeed, there was hardly a man mixing in any sort of society in the neighbourhood, who had not come to see Fanny Berkeley and Harry Bolton "spliced." Even poor Paddy had been unable to keep away, and there he was looking blonder and lankier than ever, and very dusty, too, with the long walk in from Sandown. Why he had not come by rail, he probably best knew himself; but anyhow, there he was as tall as life, and just as well behaved as other people, indeed a great deal more so than many.

There had been a stir through the church, and a confused murmur of voices. "Poor beggar, I would not stand in his shoes," and, "I would not be in her place for something," as Major Bolton walked up the church, followed by his best man, a good-looking young fellow, well over six foot, and more than broad in proportion, indeed already threatening to be stout, but with a face that, though not handsome, would have been a sufficient introduction in any society, in short, Curzon, senior lieutenant of "Ours," about to sail in the same troop ship as the Boltons. He had been a friend of Major Bolton's for years, as much as was possible, being so much his junior, and he had now run down to Ryde to back him up on this important occasion of his life. But the murmur that followed these two up the church, was nothing to that which arose when a flutter of white draperies became visible at the door, and the Hon. Peregrine Portle, better known as Pery, appeared

trying to force a path through the crowd. Pery was not a little agitated by the position in which he found himself; he had never seen Florence before, and Fanny only when she was almost a child, and he had come down as aforesaid, more from a desire to disoblige his titled brother, than to oblige his fair nieces; thus only coming down to Ryde late the night before, he had been struck all of a heap, as he afterwards said himself, telling the story, when he saw two such very lovely apparitions come down and get into the carriage. He had retained just sufficient presence of mind notwithstanding to alight in order to hand them in, and get in after them himself, and then he sat and gazed admiringly at them, and had hardly got over his admiration, when the carriage arrived at the church door, and he had to begin making a way through the crowd, with the beautiful Fanny herself hanging on his arm.

Fascinating Fan was the very picture of

a bride, and there were not two opinions about that in the church ; as to Florence, the ladies mostly thought she looked too pale, and that the blue ribbons mixed with white lace, which she wore for a bonnet, were unbecoming to her, but the men did not quite agree with the ladies about this, and some of them thought very much the contrary. The young ladies were all well pleased with Major Bolton's demeanour, and they are, I suppose, the best judges of this ; he did not look at all foolish, at least not in their eyes, and they were quite sure he loved her very much, in which they were certainly right. The best man looked as if he would rather have taken a more prominent part in the ceremony, and this is also probably the best expression for a best man to assume, though in this instance it came very naturally, for Lieutenant Curzon with his broad, well-turned shoulders, was rather in the habit of looking as if he had not quite enough to do, and would gladly undertake a little more.

So much for the men, so often a faulty part in this popular show.

The whole effect was admirable, the wedding party was certainly more select than numerous, but still this being the case, better suited people to the parts they had to play, could hardly have been picked out anywhere. Pery Portle certainly did not look quite staid enough for the heavy father of comedy, but then many people are of opinion, that for this rôle a juvenile brother rosily unconscious of the gravity of the ceremony is even more taking than a gouty leg and white hairs, and Pery combined some of the advantages of both ages. Much taller than his elder brother, with an equally expanded chest, he was also a singularly handsome man, with a fairly correct Greek profile, glittering blue eyes, and an expression of unmixed *bonhommie*, which in this instance happily saved the little group from appearing at all forlorn, a danger it might otherwise have run; he

looked both dignified and unconscious of so doing, and above all handsome, and a fitting uncle for the Berkeleys. Fanny in an interminable flow of white silk, and a very beautiful Point d'Alençon veil, formerly her mother's, looked quite her best, her fine figure showing off her clothes, and they in their turn setting off her brilliant complexion and golden hair, at the same time revealing just enough of her well-cut features to make the beholder wish to see more, that most desirable of veil effects. Florence gave the poetry to the scene, as Pery the jollity, her alabaster complexion was even more like alabaster than usual, with only pale blue ribbons relieving the dead white of the remainder of her costume, and the tinge of anxiety on her face was very becoming.

"The white rose-bud beat the bride hollow," said Lord Bellamour, and many people were of his opinion. As to the men of the party, enough has already been said about them.

There were no tears shed, nor any kissing in the church, only the Hon. Peregrine seized his opportunity in the vestry, and the service was all over in almost less time than it has taken to write about it. Very supremely happy did Harry Bolton look as he walked down the church with his bride upon his arm; as for Fanny, she rather took people by surprise, appearing very downcast, and never once raising her eyes, in which some people thought there was even a suspicion of tears. Was she thinking of the time, so long ago, when she first began to fancy in her day dreams, how she should look leaning upon Harry Bolton's arm, on much such an occasion as the present? Ah, but how different it would have been all those years ago!

Florence followed her sister very closely on Mr. Curzon's arm; he had been in a terrible fright lest Pery, having no one to conduct out himself, might defraud him of his rights, and now the young giant's heart

beat a little faster than usual as the white rosebud's little hand rested lightly on his arm. He would have given a good deal at that moment to have played the more prominent part in the ceremony, which all along he had seemed to be coveting, with Florence Berkeley to play the other most prominent part, and yet he had never seen her before that day ; but then such are men, at least some of them. The bride and bridegroom having disposed of themselves, the other three followed them in another carriage to Mrs. Cholmondeley's little house, it having been decided that they should all assemble there and change their costumes, rather than at the Bulmers', as it would have been awkward for the bride to go where the bridegroom was expressly interdicted.

There was a hurried little luncheon rather than a breakfast, and a hurried changing of dresses, and then the whole party started off together again with the addition of Mrs.

Cholmondeley this time, and faced the Pier in a body. At Portsmouth they dispersed, Major and Mrs. Bolton going off to spend a day or two in retirement before starting on their long voyage, Mr. Curzon to stay with some neighbouring cousins before the same event, Perie for Paris, and Mrs. Cholmondeley and Florence for London.

"I can't understand Lord Bulmer's having advanced that money," said Major Bolton before they parted.

"It was really very kind of him, was it not?" said Fanny, "and he would not even let me thank him for it. I wonder when we shall be able to pay it back."

"You are never to pay it back," said Florence, "and we are never to see or hear anything more of him, or of Cousin Mary either."

"Oh, you will make it up very soon, now you are left behind alone," said Major Bolton, hopefully. "It certainly is confoundedly generous of him, that I must say; but

as he has no children, of course he ought to do something for you and Fanny, so I shall look upon this gift as her wedding portion. It is only a pity it is spent already," he added, with an echo of his old bitter laugh, but Fanny said "Nonsense, Harry," in her own decided way, and in a few minutes he was laughing with a merry re-acquired laugh, such as had been very familiar to the Harry Bolton of long ago, but such as Major Bolton had never known till now.

There was an agonized embrace between the sisters on the platform of the Portsmouth station, an embrace which all spectators saw gratis, and appeared greatly interested by, and then Major Bolton kissed Florence too, it was his first time, and after that she followed Mr. Curzon, who had good-naturedly turned his back upon the whole proceeding, and joined Mrs. Cholmondeley and Perie to wait with them till their train was ready to start. Perie and Mr. Curzon started with the two ladies,

when the train was ready after a few minutes' waiting, but in a short time they separated from them, going a little way further together, and then parting also. Of the bridal pair no one saw anything more after the Portsmouth station.

"Well, it all went off very well," said little Captain Lorraine, who had come down to the Isle of Wight again for one or two days, and, like not a few more, had found a pleasurable pain in witnessing the ceremony.

"There's the devil and all to pay with the Bulmers though," and young Clifford gave a long puff at his cigar, in a manner he had recently copied from Major Bolton, and really not unsuccessfully. "They say Bolton was all but arrested at the last moment, and how they got the money to pay him free is beyond every one. I believe Bulmer quite counted on its being stopped somehow, so he can't have."

"But what is to become of Miss Florence

Berkeley? Lord Bulmer can't have quarrelled with her because of her sister's marriage."

"Yes, he has though," said young Clifford knowingly, "worse with her than with the sister. Some people say it is Lady Bulmer who refused to have her in the house any longer."

"Better hold your tongue if you can't speak more sense than that," and the spruce little commander began to bristle up so fiercely that young Clifford thought best to back out with—"Anyhow the Bulmers are going abroad almost immediately, and Miss Florence Berkeley is not going with them. Perhaps she has had enough of foreign parts already, and does not care about any more travelling," and he turned upon his heel.

"Miss Berkeley made a lovely bride, did not she?" said the eldest Miss Clifford to poor Paddy standing disconsolate upon the Pier, waiting for a steamer to take him

away ; for the orders had come at last, which Mr. O'Neile had been dreading for the last month or more, and was now so very glad to get, when they really came. He was to be removed from Sandown, and take no more long walks into Ryde. The dusty one that morning had been his last.

"Yes, she looked very well," said he rather absently, looking about for imaginary luggage, for he knew well enough his own boxes had not come down the Pier yet.

"I think Florence Berkeley much the most beautiful though," said Lily Clifford, the younger, "don't you, Mr. O'Neile ?"

"No, I don't think that I do," said he meditatively.

"I can't think why she always looks so unhappy," continued Lily, "I do like her so much, and I am sure she is nice, though every one says she is not. I hope she will marry somebody some day soon, much nicer than Major Bolton, though Mary and I were quite fetched by him to-day when he

leant down over his bride so nicely, looking at her all the time, weren't we, Mary ? but he is very bad form, don't you think he is bad form, Mr. O'Neile ?"

Mr. O'Neile gave her an expressive glance out of his light blue eyes, a glance that seemed to express a good deal, yet with a delightful want of perspicuity, for it might be understood anyhow. Lily Clifford understood it to mean unqualified admiration of herself, and consequent blindness to the faults or merits of others, and perhaps she was right, for that was very much about what it was intended to express. She gathered herself up and tossed her two long curls about a little, giving a corresponding glance, equally expressive of nothing in particular, and yet evidently meaning a good deal ; then Miss Clifford took up the conversation again.

"Yes, he is bad form certainly, Lily, but I almost fancy that is only from being hard up. No man can look good form if he is

always out at elbows, and I think Major Bolton would be quite O.K., if he had but a little more of the ready."

Then Paddy, who was hard up himself pretty often, moved on. With such daughters no wonder Mrs. Clifford was particular whom she allowed them to associate with. Oh, they promised to be very finished some day!

Nothing could have exceeded Lord Bulmer's surprise, when he heard the carriage drive away containing the Berkeleys and his scapegrace younger brother—nothing could have exceeded his surprise, unless it were his anger. He had plotted and contrived in a manner, as he had said, particularly distasteful to his nature, to stop this marriage, and now here it was going on all the same. And how could they have got the money? that must be Florence's doing, and Lord Bulmer winced a little as he recalled her look of scorn, when she said, she would never forget what he had done, never.

Lord Bulmer was not accustomed to scorn, he was not accustomed to have his wishes disregarded and set at nought in this way. He liked an easy comfortable life, and if people were unfortunate, he preferred forgetting them. When people chose to be unfortunate, as it seemed to him the two Berkeleys were now choosing, he thought there was no choice for other people but to forget them. Having consulted with Mary, whom he found very agreeable to his plans, and even more set against the Berkeleys than he was himself, loudly accusing them of ingratitude indeed, he determined to go abroad for a little time.

Young Clifford was not far wrong in his information, nor was Florence far wrong either when she said that she and her sister were not likely to see or hear anything more of the Bulmers. As matters stood then they were not likely to do so, till they had ascended a few more rounds in society's ladder, than it seemed probable at present,

that they ever would do. And was not Lord Bulmer justified in giving them up? they had flatly disobeyed his commands, and disregarded his advice, and before the Boltons got clear of England, Florence had already gone further on the road to ruin, than even Lord Bulmer in his gloomiest moods had anticipated, from her keeping up her friendship with her sister, and extending it to her sister's husband. He never heard of the first awful step she had taken, reducing her income to rather under sixty pounds a year, for Florence had not gone to the Bank with her cheque, but to a shop she knew well, known well indeed by most of the inhabitants of Ryde as equally ready to indulge in a friendly chat, or do any of its customers a service, besides carrying on the by no means unprofitable business for which it was first instituted. From there a messenger was instantly despatched to the Bank for her by the man in the shop, who knew her well enough to have perfect reliance on her, and Florence, who knew him

well enough to have the same on him, pledged him to secrecy, fearing lest Major Bolton might anyhow hear how it was she, who had aided him, and thus reject her aid, and this man, as happens perhaps in about one out of a thousand cases, keeping his word, it was years before anyone besides himself and Florence knew of the first step towards ruin she had taken. Of the next step, though Lord Bulmer and the world in general never knew of it, the Boltons were necessarily informed, for it was taken by Fanny's request, was in fact just the sort of step Lord Bulmer, like another Cassandra, had foretold, like her too gaining no credence from his hearers.

Before the Boltons sailed from England Florence received a letter from her sister, telling her how one dun had brought down another, and asking her if she could possibly advance them seventy pounds, without which they would not be able to sail at all. That letter was written unknown to Major Bolton, and the iron rather entered into his

soul when the money came down with an affectionate note in answer, but there was no help for it. Thanks to Lord Bulmer's previous exertions to stop the marriage, though of this Major Bolton was unaware, his creditors had been brought down upon him in a quite unlooked-for manner, and were harsh without precedent in their remarks.

As to Fanny she was simply glad to see the money arrive, and felt no reluctance about accepting the loan of it; she had always been in the habit of overdrawing herself, and knowing her sister was starting clear, thought there could be no difficulty about Florence's advancing this money for a little, and of course they would take care to pay it back very soon. So the Boltons sailed for Mauritius, and Florence was left in London with Mrs. Cholmondeley, having just reduced her income to rather under sixty pounds a year, and lent seventy pounds to Major Bolton.

BOOK III.

LUCIA LAVINGTON'S CAREER.

"For we experience that *what we were to be*, was to be the effect of *what we would do:* and that the general conduct of nature is, not to save us trouble or danger, but to make us capable of going through them, and to put it upon us to do so."—BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

It is June in London, and it is hot work sitting in the Row, and hotter work riding, and the horses seem to love to congregate together in the shade, and their riders are forced to have more general conversation, and fewer *tête-à-têtes* than earlier in the season, for the sun is all powerful, and few care to brave his darts by regulation riding up and down. People are already *blasés*, and the last new fashions are no longer new, and no one can by any possibility now find anything more *outrée* than what every one else is wearing. Town is hard up for a sensation,

and the loungers in the Row are hard up for a subject; the débutantes have already been discussed in all their points; the Academy, of course, long ago; indeed, it is almost as good as saying, "Let us change the subject at any price," to speak of a picture now, except of course among art circles, and these not being the staple of society, are not included in this very brief and general description of the state of things. There is no horrid scandal afloat; indeed, there is nothing going on, though judging by the heavy eyes and pale cheeks all about, there seems to be quite enough to exhaust most people pretty thoroughly. No one looks up to anything more, and yet everyone is always suggesting something to revive drooping energies.

"Been to many balls last night, Miss Beresford?" says young Beauregard, who has recently dropped into a vacant chair behind her, and having now almost recovered from the exertion, begins to make play.

"No, really I could not. We were expected at half-a-dozen places at least, but I have been restive for a long time, so I broke loose last night, and went with Bertie to the play instead."

"Aw—did you weally?" drawled the swell; "not—seen—play—long time."

"What a lot of imagination you expect of me, Mr. Beauregard! Well, if you have not been to the play for a long time, I advise you to go to-night. Something new—you know," said she, with an attempt at mimicking him.

"Aw—now you're laughing at me, I know you are." It would be a curious calculation for any one to add up how many times this is said in the Row in the course of any sunshiny morning during the season. "Too bad, by Jove! Oh, can't go to the play, you know—just dinner-time, and the actwesses no air now-a-days, not any diffwent from what one sees here every morning—and at the balls. No, 'pon

honour, can't see any diffwence, that I can't."

"Perhaps not," said Miss Beresford, laughing really this time, "and you think we have no air either, I suppose. But you could not say that, if you saw the actress we saw last night, though the word air would never occur to you then, for it is nothing to what she has got. Oh, Bertie is gone clean mad about her, and I have it on my conscience to think it is all my doing he ever saw her."

"Oh, no, you are not weally sorry about it, are you ? You would not look like that, if you were weally sorry, would you ?"

"Indeed I am sorry though. It is a shocking thing to have one's brother, one's only brother too, madly in love with an actress, though she is the most perfectly beautiful creature, one ever set eyes upon, and her acting—oh, it was too life-like !"

"No, weally, but is she pretty, do you say ?"

"Pretty! oh no. I tell you she is simply perfect—as a statue—as a picture—as an actress, which last is the way in which I saw her. As a woman, I can of course say nothing about her, but I daresay Bertie can by this time."

"What theatre was it? what do you say is her name?"

"Lucia Lavington. Oh, I see you are getting excited at last. Well you had better make haste and secure a stall at the New Theatre for Wednesday. She is to appear in a new piece there, written expressly for herself, and they say the boxes are going like wild fire. Bertie has just secured one for us."

"Oh, difficult to get a place, will it be? must go, of course, then." After a few moments' pause; "You don't offer me a seat in your box?"

"No; because it is full," laughed Miss Beresford again. Beauregard certainly seemed to amuse her very well. "Captain

and Mrs. Lorraine are going with us, and the fascinating young widower. I have not only seen him now, do you know, but more than that, I have made his acquaintance."

"Well!"

"Well! what a tone to be sure! however if you wish to know, he beats description, positively beats it hollow."

"You seem quite enthusiastic this morning. Certainly vewy wefweshing, vewy."

"So glad you find it so. You look as if you were rather in want of a pick-me-up, and I am happy to be able to serve the purpose. But speak of the sun, and you will always see the first rays of the dawning! I translate for your benefit you see, knowing you would declare you did not understand me, if I said it in French. There he comes, now don't make me misbehave myself," and Miss Beresford negligently drooped a pink lined parasol, so as to cast a becoming glow over her face, and with "eyes right,"

awaited the coming of the hero, casually looking up, when he came near enough, just so as to give a pretty little nod of recognition, as she said: "How do you do, Mr. Gordon."

Percy Gordon was sauntering along on the arm of a friend, he now disengaged himself, and came up to Miss Beresford. The three years that have passed, since we last saw him, have perhaps increased his languor, and perfected his "form," but certainly they have not detracted in any way from his personal charms. The deep black crape upon his hat shows him to be now without that almost insuperable impediment in the way of men's drawing-room successes, a wife, whilst that loss, as is pretty well known by those interested, has only robbed him of a portion of the goods he got with her. A young widower with money, he is now in his element. In Australia he was a failure, but in May Fair he is a great success. By no means a good

parti, not even a tolerable one, if all the truth were known, he is already an *enfant cheri*, and almost as much courted, as if he were a Duke's eldest son. Percy Gordon takes the courting very quietly, and has not as yet exerted himself to do anything of the same kind in return, and he now wears a very blasé air, like most of the people around him, but not a tiresomely blasé air, like many of them. No one would ever say he looked bored ; more tired, depressed, languid, blasé if you like, but not bored.

He now came up with a very perfect smile, and a "Making the most of this fine morning, I see," in return for Miss Beresford's "How do you do, Mr. Gordon."

"Yes," said the young lady, going on with the conversation, "if you call it making the most of a fine morning to sit in the shade and criticise one's friends in the sun."

"Some people are nothing if they are not

critical, but I think you could do something better," replied Percy, in those same soft high-bred tones, that had been quite wasted on the bush, but were just the capital best calculated to start with in Belgravia.

"Thanks for your good opinion of me, though I do not know how I have deserved it. But remember, you must be something else than critical on Wednesday night. Bertie has told me you are coming with us. But no, now I think of it, you may be as critical as you like."

"You have seen her then—this Miss Lavington."

"Yes, last night. She took the part of Ophelia, and oh! I had never made up my mind before, whether Hamlet loved her or not."

"And now you have no doubt," said Percy Gordon, with a sorrowful smile, but *cela va sans dire*, only this time he felt sorrowful also, "and yet she so little understands him, that she thinks him mad. Do

you recollect the speech: 'He took me by the wrist, and held me hard?'"

"Oh yes, I shall never forget it again after last night. But you should have heard how she said it, with such an unutterable longing, as if she must go to him, was only telling about him for his good, and understood him through it all, though no one else did."

"You think she really loved him then? And yet she went mad herself about her father's death!" he went on, more as if to himself than to her, with a dreamy look in the lovely blue eyes, over which the eyelids drooped languidly, almost veiling them with long dark lashes.

"Because she loved Hamlet so very much," replied Miss Beresford, "and she knew he never, never could be hers now. I never thought so before, but I am sure of it now. Oh, you should have seen her handing the flowers about and singing those snatches of songs," and the recollec-

tion so far overcame the overwrought, excitable girl, that a tear or two began to roll down her cheeks.

"If you lower your pawasol, people may not notice. They're beginning to stare, but no rouge coming off yet," said Beauregard from behind her.

"Oh, I hate you," exclaimed Miss Beresford, and turned still more to Mr. Gordon, who appeared lost in thought.

"It was all acting, you know," he said, after a few minutes. "Acting is often very touching. I sometimes think it is a pity it should not be real, however it never is. I will promise not to be critical on Wednesday, it is not my line at all. *Au revoir* somewhere or other," and with a light touch of his hat he went on again.

"Linda," said Miss Beresford's married sister, who was doing *chaperone* for her that morning, and had up to this time been fully taken up saying airy little nothings to a young giant of a genial countenance, "you

will hardly have time for any shopping before Lady Lankester's kettle-drum, if we don't go home to luncheon now."

"I am sure I am quite ready, Tina, dear," and then the four moved off together, young Beauregard thinking it was time to "bweak his fast" too, and Captain Curzon evidently not thinking pretty Mrs. Jenkinson capable to pilot herself, even through the now rapidly thinning crowd, to her carriage at the end of the Row. The faithless Bertie was nowhere to be found, though he had undertaken to escort his sisters that morning. Bertie, however, was, as Linda had said, wild about Miss Lucia Lavington, and he had been busy all the morning making himself agreeable to all his acquaintance who had he thought any theatrical connexion whatever, hoping to get an invitation to meet her from someone or other of them, and now, having been unsuccessful, he was taking a consolation canter on Percy Gordon's horse before going

homewards, and altogether oblivious of his sisters, quite an unparalleled event in the life of Bertram Beresford, who had never been known to be forgetful of a promise before. And though he had seen both Curzon and Beauregard take up their position beside them, and had every reason to think his sisters would be quite as well taken care of by them as by himself, still certainly he was very inexcusable, and I am sorry to have to introduce him to my readers, departing in such an undesirable manner from the even tenour of his daily life.

Percy Gordon, meanwhile, had left the Row, to go to luncheon in a pretty little house, not far from the Park, where resided Captain and Mrs. Northwey. He had recently met Mrs. Northwey again, and at once renewed his acquaintance with the large *simpatica* eyes, though he saw at a glance that she had gone a long way down hill since he saw her last. Poor little Mrs.

Northwey! a woman, who had once made such a mistake as that of marrying Captain Northwey, was not likely to commit no others in the course of her after life; it showed weakness at least, and all that weakness had come out in her long ere this. She had been saved by Florence Berkeley once, but sometimes now she thought it would have been almost better for herself, though not for Percy Gordon, not for him certainly, if Florence had not saved her, and then she would wonder sorrowfully what Florence Berkeley would think of her now, if she were to see her, and learn what a low creature she had sunk into.

Captain Northwey had been so fascinated by his friend's schooner Kafoozelum, that he had tried yachting on his own account, but only for a little while, he soon found it too expensive an amusement for a man of his means. Cards on the other hand are under some circumstances very profitable, and Captain Northwey was not long before he took

measure for placing himself in a position to find them so. A pretty house in London, with a wife who had large *simpatica* eyes, and the power of making people confide in her, these advantages he started with, and he made good use of them, and took care that they should serve his purposes, and now he was very comfortably established during the season in town, with plenty of loose cash to enable him afterwards to run down to Ryde, or some such place, and do a few months' yachting again, carrying on the same little game in between whiles. He had been nothing loath, when Percy re-appeared upon the scenes ; Percy, though not a *parti*, was quite rich enough to make it worth Captain Northwey's while to let his wife make love to him, or be made love to by him, as the case might be.

Percy Gordon knew quite enough of the world to see at once that he would have to pay his footing in Mrs. Northwey's house, but he could afford it he thought, and he

would be careful. In truth, the price he expected to have to pay for her society, really enhanced its value in his eyes. As for Mrs. Northwey, she was very sorry when she saw him reappear upon the scenes. When she had known him last, she had been what she thought he might have loved, though whether he had or not, she had never known. Now was she to be seen at her worst by the man whose opinion she had once cared for more than she had ever cared for that of any other man? treating her past feelings for him as lightly as possible.

Though she was in her husband's power, and knew that he would do his worst, and that that worst would be unutterably bad, were she to refuse anything, I think she would have proved a little restive when Percy Gordon re-appeared, if it had not been that the very first time of her seeing him again, he stayed quite long enough in her presence for his sorrowful smile and soft

sweet tones to re-assert all their old dominion over her. She must see him again after that, though she still wished, with bitter, very bitter tears, that he had not reappeared. The intimacy had been going on some little time, when Percy Gordon went to luncheon on that hot June day; he had spent not a few evenings at the Northweys' house, and played at cards during those evenings, losing a little, and gaining a little too, but still losing on the whole, though nothing as yet to speak of. Up to this time his footing had not cost him dear.

Mrs. Northwey was alone when he was shown into the pretty little drawing-room, feeling very cool and dark and pleasant after all the blazing sunshine outside. She was sitting on a low chair; Mrs. Northwey rarely, if ever, sat on any other kind of chair, except during meal-times, when the laws of society demanded that she should sacrifice her own private inclinations so far

as to condescend to the orthodox dining-room chair. She was arranging flowers in two tiny vases on a tiny table beside her, and she barely desisted from her occupation for a moment, holding out her hand without rising. Percy Gordon had become a very frequent visitor of late.

"I have come to apologize at once for breaking my engagement with you next Wednesday. This new actress, whom everyone is raving about, is going to appear in a new piece, which everyone is going to see, and somehow I am in for it," and Percy sunk with a sigh into a luxurious arm-chair, making himself quite at home, in the way he so well understood, and which so few men can ever acquire.

"Have you seen her?" Then in answer to the "No," more expressed than said, "Is it not curious, how no one ever has seen what everyone is talking about? I have often noticed it before. So you are going to see this new actress on Wednesday!

Well, I almost think I will go myself, there are only one or two of Captain Northwey's intimates coming, and I daresay they could be put off, or do without me," she added with a laugh. The years that have passed since we last saw her, have left their traces upon her, they have altered much in her, but nothing so much as her laugh. It would be hard to describe the change, but anyone must have felt it at once.

"I am sorry I cannot offer to escort you, but I am engaged to go with a party. If I can be of any use getting you a box, or anything, pray command me."

"I should never think of making *you* of use," said Mrs. Northwey, glancing at him with her large dark eyes, and then removing them provokingly quickly.

"Why? is it because you think me so useless?" and Percy Gordon turned a sorrowful earnest gaze upon her, which Mrs. Northwey blushed under, but did not seem to care to face.

"No, too precious," she said, quickly, snapping off a lovely but stubborn Gloire de Dijon as she spoke, in her efforts to force its stalk into the water.

"Do you really think so?" and Percy Gordon drew a little closer to her. "Do you remember that time at Ryde?" he asked. It was the first time they had either of them alluded to it.

Mrs. Northwey looked up at him with her large expressive eyes. "You knew what it was to be misunderstood then, perhaps now you have forgotten. Alas, I have fresh cause to know it every day," and she sighed deeply. She did not probably mean to regret that her husband was not dead, as well as his wife, though it sounded like it; but her speech jarred upon Percy, who recollected Evelyn dying not so very long ago, and did not care to talk about his beautiful dead wife to Mrs. Northwey.

"Poor rose!" he said instead, "you have

broken its head off," and picking up the still lovely, though now discarded flower, he pressed it to his lips.

"Tell me more about this actress though," said Mrs. Northwey, rising to deposit the tiny vases in their proper places, which seemed after all not to be the tiny table. "Is she so very lovely? or does she act well? or what is her great charm?"

"I believe her beauty is the great charm, at least that is what the common herd are raving about; but one or two good judges have told me that her acting is quite first class in certain passages. There is a fear lest this new piece, though written expressly for her, should be too melodramatic. As far as I can make out from what people say, what she would really excel in would be French Tragedy, but then who would care to go to see that? As Ophelia, I hear that she drew tears from her audience."

"I cannot bear Ophelia," said Mrs. Northway testily, "she always seems to me all

milk and water. There is no fire in her."

"What is the use of fire?" said Percy, languidly, "it all burns itself out, and nobody is the better for it."

"Oh, I suppose you like Hamlet then."

"No, he is tiresome, I grant you; but I don't know much about any of Shakespeare's heroes. Bertram is the only one that takes my fancy."

"Bertram! what did he do, but marry a woman he did not love? True, he did not do so till he was obliged, and even then did nothing more than was absolutely necessary, made no pretence of loving her, till he really did," and Mrs. Northwey fixed a scrutinizing gaze on Percy's beautiful features.

He moved uneasily under it. "He loved her in the end," he said very low, then rousing himself, and trying to speak in an indifferent off-hand manner, that hardly sat naturally upon him: "I like an obstinate unconventional man."

"I cannot say I do, and I hope you are not by way of copying him, so far as to be too unconventional to eat luncheon, for I hear the bell. Captain Northwey must be in the dining-room, I think. I heard him come in just now," said Mrs. Northwey, trying to follow Percy's lead, and appear equally unconcerned.

Then they went down to luncheon, and had no more *tête-à-têtes* that day. Indeed they had had quite enough that morning to last them some time. That allusion to the time at Ryde had been a dangerous one. It was not much good for Percy to admire Bertram after that, and say *he* loved his wife in the end. Mrs. Northwey knew better than to believe Percy had ever learnt to love his wife; she remembered "that time at Ryde."

CHAPTER II.

"A TONE, A TOUCH, A LITTLE LOOK MAY BE SO MUCH."

It is Wednesday night, and the new theatre is crammed from top to bottom, there is not even standing room left, and everyone is all impatience for the first piece to be at an end, and "Noblesse oblige" to begin, for in this latter only Miss Lucia Lavington is to make her appearance. The Beresfords' box is not quite as it was intended to be, Mrs. Lorraine has failed at the last moment, and Tina sits in the front to look after Linda, behind whom a place after all has been contrived for Beauregard,

while Percy Gordon is doing the agreeable to pretty little Mrs. Jenkinson, and Bertie and Captain Lorraine have ensconced themselves in the background.

There has been a buzz of talking through the house, and even the beautiful exquisitely tender overture has been only half appreciated, but at last the curtain rises upon "Noblesse oblige," and the whole theatre at once becomes intent, though Miss Lucia Lavington does not appear at first, but instead of her, her father and brother in the piece, and shortly afterwards her lover. First the brother is asking for some education, some opening to be given to him, much as does Orlando in "As you like it," and the father refuses, because as a gentleman he cannot allow his son to be mixed up with farmers' and low tradesmen's sons, and as a poor man he cannot afford to do more for him. "A profession is too expensive, and do you think I esteem so lightly of my son, my only son, as to allow him to

go into trade? No, thank Heaven, the Beaumarchais have always been gentlemen, whatever else they may have been."

The son, a handsome, but sulky looking young fellow, acquiesces ; then appears the lover, well favoured, ambitious, but, alas! lowly born, and asks for Blanche Beaumarchais' hand, only to be indignantly refused, and have all his assurances of future distinction and fortune thrown in his teeth with an additional taunt about his birth. Lawrence Gray rushes away outraged and indignant, and Beaumarchais *père* proceeds to regret to his son that even genius should be such a radical, and more often the portion of the lower orders than of the blue veined aristocracy. "Fancy your sister married to a painter now! No, thank Heaven, the Beaumarchais have not yet fallen so low, though for long they have been unable to pay their debts. But honesty is a vulgar virtue, whilst honour is the prerogative of the gentleman."

The next scene reveals Blanche Beaumarchais plucking a flower to pieces, much as does Marguerite in Faust. "He comes —he comes not," she is saying, but her words are scarcely audible, such bursts of applause greet her appearance from the galleries, who seem to be already well acquainted with her. Although the boxes and stalls have for the most part never seen her before, they join in readily—though of course in the dignified manner for which they are distinguished—so inimitable is the grace of her attitude, so sweetly earnest the expression of the fair young face, which never changes for an instant, nor glances from the flower despite all the noisy clapping, and reiterated bravos, for this actress is new to the boards, and has not yet learnt the regulation curtsey, which often detracts so much from the entry of a long established professional. At last the clamours of the audience are stilled into silence even more by the calm, peaceful grace of the

young actress, than by the loud hushes of the *claqueurs* (that was all the *claqueurs* were good for during that night, and for many nights after, they had to say "Hush" often and loudly, there was no need for them to cry "Bravo,") and before the flower is quite destroyed, Lawrence Gray appears, and tells her how he is going out into the world to seek fortune and fame as an artist. He makes no love protestations, and carries himself altogether more as an injured man fresh from the insults of the father, than as the lover of the daughter. The sweet girlish face grows troubled, she seeks to soothe his offended pride, and talks to him of the aristocracy of talent, in which of course he is to win the foremost place. He listens only half appeased; then an old gipsy appears, and nothing will satisfy Lawrence but that they should have their fortunes told before they part. Blanche shrinks back, but he holds out his hand, while the gipsy in traditional style promises

him a fortune and a bonny bride, with a not unmeaning look at Blanche, a carriage and four, and seeing him not yet satisfied, she throws in a title, though what title she does not reveal. Lawrence hopes it may be R.A. He then insists upon Blanche showing her hand, she does so, though unwillingly, and the gipsy beginning with "Blessings on your bonny face," goes on in the same tone, "Loneliness, and hardship, and hunger, and disgrace, and—Oh take back the money, take it back. Is it I will take your siller for telling you such a fortune? Oh, and to think of it with such a bonny face, ochone, ochone, ochone!" and rushes away leaving the two young people considerably frightened. They then see the brother coming, and Lawrence tears himself away, carrying off the remnant of the rose, more as a pledge of better things than as a love token. The girl here at last gives way, and stands looking after him motionless, with clasped hands, the tears rolling

fast down her cheeks. This situation excited much applause, but of a more subdued nature, people were already becoming too much interested to clap, and Blanche Beaumarchais' sorrow seemed too real to be treated as any ordinary acting.

Here the curtain fell, rather unnecessarily as it would seem, for it rose upon the same two actors as those on whom it had dropped; probably it was to allow a little vent to the enthusiasm, which as it was beforehand known, the finale of the last scene was calculated to elicit. The brother is now upbraiding Blanche with her low tastes, she bears it very meekly for a time, till at last she says, she wonders he should upbraid her, who is himself in love with the gamekeeper's daughter. "But you would marry Gray, and I—do you think I would ever marry Kate? No, she is a brave girl and a beauty, but such alliances are not for gentlemen." Blanche turns sorrowfully away, and the curtain falls.

This was too short a scene, and the audience seemed to think so. Encore, encore, they cried; the piece was only so many scenes long, they knew, and if many of the scenes were as short as the last, they feared they might not get sufficient quantity for their money; of the quality they had no longer any doubt. Encore, encore, they cried, till the scene was gone through again; there was nothing in it besides that last sorrowful turning again, but that people felt as if they could never be tired of seeing.

"She will do," said one newspaper critic to another, "the second time not so good as the first, but a girl who can repeat herself so well is a living wonder. Help me to a few long words, I mean to do her justice when I go home to-night, and the public likes something grandiloquent."

"Wrong shop, old fellow. Mine is slap-dash, you know. She is A 1; that is what I shall say."

"Wonderful!" said an art critic, among the upper ten, in a congratulatory tone, to the manager; "how she concentrates herself upon what she has in hand! I don't believe she has one thought all through, that does not belong to Blanche Beaumarchais."

"Glad to hear your lordship say so," said the manager delightedly. Not that he wanted any assurances of success, he knew that it was his, and Lucia Lavington's, but such speeches are like gold to a manager, when they proceed from such distinguished art critics.

"What made you choose this piece?"

"It was written to her face, the author says."

Then the curtain drew up for the second Act; that began with the arrest of the father. He refuses to walk to prison, and stands out for driving there in his own carriage; Blanche stands tearful by, whilst her father assures her that there is capital com-

pany in a debtor's prison, and he expects to meet with many of his old friends among the aristocracy. He bids his son go work and waste no more time in idleness, seemingly forgetful that he himself has been up to this time, the chief cause of his doing so, and advises Blanche to go as companion to her aunt Lady Foozle, who must of necessity give her house-room, and with whom she will be able to go about as a lady should. Then came rather a tiresome scene, in which Blanche, looking very pale and worn, in a faded muslin, tries to bear with the tempers and caprices of the old miser, who finally orders her out of her house, because she is convinced, though apparently quite without cause, that Blanche intends to get possession of some of her gold in order to pay her father's debts. After this there is a scene in the London streets at night; in this the scenic effect was admirable, it might all have been seen certainly just as well, by means of a short walk in

the London streets any other night, but the audience appeared delighted by its representation upon the stage, and great praise was lavished upon the scene painter. Blanche emerges from the crowd after the first few minutes, during which people had been fully occupied admiring the general effect, and recognising familiar objects; she is insulted, and throws herself upon the protection of a man passing by, who turns out to be her brother. He has just come out of a billiard-room, and is jingling his winnings, hardly a wise proceeding, considering the state of the London streets after nightfall, whilst planning a little whitebait dinner at Greenwich next day, with Kate, and a few more people. He seems rather ashamed of his sister, who talks of seeking out some occupation, and tells her the green cloth and the green turf, between them, are keeping him like a gentleman; giving her to understand at the same time that he

himself is anything but green. Rather necessary this, considering that jingling of the money. Finally, he gives her a sovereign, on condition that she troubles him no more. This was the end of the second Act.

In the third Act Blanche, grown alarmingly wan, is discovered singing at a cheap concert; she sings one song with great feeling and sweetness, and is immediately deluged with coarse low compliments; then called upon to sing another, she is overcome by the ignominy of her position, and breaks into a lamentable succession of false notes, on which she is hissed off, and discharged instanter by the manager. A benevolent-looking old gentleman, whom it seems strange to find in such a place, and of whom all the audience at the theatre seem to have a great suspicion, to judge by the expression of their faces, apparently thinking him only a ticket-of-leave man made up for the occasion, catches her as she is going away, and informing her he is an

artist, requests her to sit as Despair for a picture of the Passions, on which he is now engaged. She agrees, and the next scene is laid in the artist's studio with Blanche Beaumarchais sitting as Despair, whilst the old man paints her. The sitting is interrupted by the entrance of Lawrence Gray, the old man's pupil. His surprised indignation, and scarcely *sotto voce* maledictions of her father and brother can easily be imagined, also Blanche's timid joy at seeing him again. Finding her in this line of business, as he says, he insists on her sitting to himself as a Guardian Angel, and in the coolest manner alters her drapery, and takes possession of the studio and easel of the benevolent old man, who is most opportunely called away on business. Blanche looks at Lawrence Gray, and with wonderful readiness assumes the expression of a Guardian Angel; this was perhaps the prettiest scene in the whole play; it is cut short by Lawrence's ill-advised love-making.

Blanche in her then situation thinks courtship out of the question, and fancies he is insulting her. She discards her artistic drapery, and hurries from the room in the old faded muslin once more, just pausing at the door to say to her lover: "You have not only robbed me of my love for you, which was all I had, but you have taken from life itself all—all that made it worth the living." Lawrence springs up to follow her, and explain how honourable are his intentions, but she exclaims: "Stay, I command you, nor dare to follow me now. Do not you be the first to show me how lone and unprotected I am." Lawrence stands still on this, and contents himself with a rhapsody on Blanche's perfections, in which the audience appeared heartily to agree. In the next scene Blanche is discovered stitching away at the everlasting shirt by the light of a tallow candle, barely desisting from her work to gulp down a few mouthfuls of water, and try to eat some

morsels of stale-looking bread, which she seems too exhausted to succeed in swallowing. After making this unsuccessful attempt, she leans her head upon her hand, and the shirt falls upon the floor while she faints away. During all this scene there has been soft music playing, now it gradually ceases, and in place of it there is heard a rustling of silks outside the door, and two fashionably dressed ladies, one old, the other young, are shown in by the somewhat dilapidated mistress of the lodgings. All start in horror at finding Blanche insensible, and the stale bread, which now turns out to be mouldy also, and glass of water, tell their own tale. Caresses are lavished upon her, and restoratives applied, and gradually Blanche recovers sufficiently to be told that they are distant cousins just returned from abroad, who have heard of her miserable condition, though never expecting to find it half so miserable as the reality, and who have

now come to take her to their own luxurious home. Blanche appears only half to understand, but is borne off the stage still in a half fainting condition, and the scene finishes with a rather humorous speech of the landlady, who regrets much she had never known her lodger had such fine friends, or she would have taken care to have curried favour with her, been like "a good Samaritan to her" in fact, instead of letting her starve herself to death, and counting on the profits she would make by letting her room twice over, for Blanche, as it would appear, had paid her rent beforehand, and the landlady had no idea she could last out till the time expired.

This being the first attempt at humour in the piece, was a decided relief to the feelings of the audience, which had so long been at tension, and it was admirably received.

The next Act opened with a small Belgravian kettle drum, at which Blanche,

now beautifully dressed and having regained her complexion, enchants the company with the same song in which she broke down at the concert, though her voice still trembled a little where those fatal false notes were. After the piece had run for about a week, it became the fashion to encore that song, so that it was soon quite a matter of course to repeat it, and the more Blanche's voice trembled the better the audience were pleased, but this first night every one was now too curious to hear the *dénouement*, too anxious to see the beautiful Blanche recompensed for all her sufferings, to care to prolong the intervening time.

Finally, Blanche and a certain Lord Richman are left sole denizens of the drawing-room, and he, with many protestations, throws himself and his fortune at her feet. She refuses both without an instant's hesitation ; he recalls to her her father lingering out a miserable old age in the

debtor's prison, declares he has been to see him, and paints a most harrowing picture of his existence there, then touches upon his own fortune and unencumbered acres. The cousins reappear, and add their solicitations to his, the younger a regular nineteenth century young lady, and practical accordingly, declaring she thinks it wrong even to hesitate about so good an offer; and the elder, while expressing her desire for "dear Blanche's happiness," intimating that she knows no one better fitted to secure it than Lord Richman, with his many estimable qualities. Blanche consents to reconsider her decision, and Lord Richman departs ecstatic.

The next scene is with the father in the debtor's prison; he seems to be having a very easy life of it, though with a coat considerably out at elbows. With some punch and devilled kidneys to comfort them, he and the Hon. John Lackwit are enjoying a quiet little game at *écarté*, when the

nineteenth century young lady, who seems to be of the rapid order, rushes in unannounced, tells him of the grand match in prospect for Blanche, and begs him to prevail upon her to consent to it by a parade of wretchedness. Together they dispose of the punch, the young lady taking her share of it with great gusto, which elicited roars of laughter, replace it by a meagre-looking glass of toast and water, make the whole room as miserable as possible, and take so long about their preparations, that the fast young lady and the Hon. John have only just time to hide together in a cupboard, before Blanche appears. Then the father paints his wretchedness in a manner to draw tears from his tender-hearted daughter, and finally extracts a promise from the still reluctant girl that she will marry Lord Richman. In the next scene Blanche, again grown deadly pale, is ordering bridal finery from an obsequious milliner, which her cousin, the fast young lady, gloats over,

envying her good fortune, and talking a good deal of slang generally. In the course of this a letter is brought to Blanche from her brother, telling her that he has just been taken up for forgery, but hopes to get off through Kate, "like the brave girl she is," having given herself up in his place, and he thinks he should be quite safe if only some one would come forward to testify to his character, and say how he has always been a gentleman; this service he now requires of his sister. Blanche does not see how she can perform it, but the fast young lady is of opinion that you ought to "stick at nothing to serve your family," and that "it would be a jolly lark to be in a witness box." The elder cousin coming in and hearing the news, almost goes into hysterics, then dwells much on the necessity for now hurrying the match with Lord Richman.

The last Act begins with a grand scene between Kate and the fast young lady, who

has taken it into her head to personate Blanche, but thinks before saving her cousin, she may as well see his victim, and "do the whole hog," as she elegantly expresses it. Kate is sullen, she is willing to be transported to save her lover, but sees no fun in the whole proceeding, and the fast young lady decides she has no pluck, is not really beautiful, and might just as well go to the colonies. Just as she has come to this decision and made up her mind, that she will go through with the business, and support her cousin, Blanche appears like a guardian angel indeed, lauds Kate to the skies for her noble generosity, upbraids her cousin for the extraordinary imprudence of her conduct, only to be equalled by its meanness, declares transportation will be just the very best thing for her brother, as in the colonies he will no longer be hampered by the idea of his old family, and so may perhaps earn an honest livelihood; and as Kate has no

objection to go there also, she promises to arrange that her brother shall marry her before starting, and hopes she will then inspire him with some of her own noble ideas. Kate embraces Blanche's knees with passionate sobs, and the fast young lady slinks away abashed.

Bravo! bravo! cried the galleries. Hush! hush! the indignant boxes, while the stalls turned contemptuously, and stared through their opera glasses, as if to discover the unhappy victims on whom the whole weight of their awful displeasure should descend, but not distinguishing them, they apparently resolved equally contemptuously to bottle it up just for the moment, and turning slowly and solemnly again, beheld Blanche informing Lord Richman how not only is her father in a debtor's prison, but her brother is a convict, and she therefore releases him from his engagement. Lord Richman is very gentlemanly, and very much in love, but this seems to

be too much for him, and he regrets that under these circumstances he feels bound to accept his release ; at the same time he most generously begs to be allowed to pay her father's debts, so as at least to leave her with a natural protector, and no longer dependent on the precarious bounty of her cousins. Blanche thanks him, but refuses this kindness, though she is so far touched by it as to permit him to kiss her hand, which he does passionately, and afterwards withdraws. Then Blanche for the first time during the whole piece looks really happy, and running to the piano, sings a pretty little song, "I am free, I am free." In the course of this song enters Lawrence Gray, the celebrated artist, whom, without mentioning his name, Lord Richman had engaged to paint Blanche's portrait. He has just heard of the match being broken off from Lord Richman himself, but has been requested still to keep his appointment, as Lord Richman would wish to possess Miss Beaumar-

chais' portrait, though from unfortunate circumstances no longer able to look forward to the happiness of possessing herself, and he feels assured she will not deny him this last favour.

Lawrence Gray does not know how to act, Blanche with her back turned does not see him, he is astonished by her merriment, and by the joyous expression of her face, which he sees reflected in a small glass hung above the piano, and gives vent to his astonishment in a soliloquy, saying how he had expected to find her buried in melancholy at the loss of her rich lover, which he seems rightly to have understood is owing to her brother's misdeeds, and in no way her own doing.

At last Blanche rises from the piano in much the same excited manner as she had sat down to it, and with a bright, happy smile, turns round, to find herself face to face with Lawrence Gray.

"Lawrence!" she exclaims, in a tone of

joyful affection. It is the first time she has ever called him by his Christian name, and all is soon hurriedly explained between them; they walk forward to the footlights, and she grows positively radiant, as he produces the withered rose she gave him long ago, and which has never left him since. This was the first scene in which Miss Lavington at all failed, her expression was more that of blessing the audience, than of being blessed herself. Mr. Richter, who took the part of Lawrence Gray, wore much more the look of gratified love, but as the young actress stood almost over the footlights, with the light shining literally through her face, hardly any one could be cold blooded enough to remark this defect. She was a beatific angel, and the whole theatre admired her as such. The last scene was of course the natural wind up. Lawrence Gray appears leading in the old father, whom Blanche receives with tearful joy. He will hardly let go of the artist's arm,

so proud is he of his approaching connexion with one who has already won for himself such a distinguished reputation, "a second Sir Joshua, invited to the Court Balls, and the intimate friend of more than one member of the Peerage. Indeed I have discovered that the spelling of his name is quite erroneous, and that he properly belongs to the well-known family of Greys, G. r. e. y."

The elder cousin congratulates Blanche on the excellent marriage she is about to make with a young man of fortune, expectations, and an already established career, assuring her at the same time that she would not rejoice in it, if she did not feel certain it was well calculated for her real happiness. Lord Richman appears, as it would seem, from a consolatory *tête-à-tête* with the fast cousin in the conservatory, and congratulates Blanche Beaumarchais with a tolerable grace, whilst the fast cousin looks from him to the artist in a manner to

signify that she at least sees her own game, and has an eye to the main chance. Thus they naturally fall into a graceful group before the footlights, upon which, after one or two concluding speeches, the curtain falls.

Thus it may be seen that there was nothing very original in the new piece, which was much like other pieces, written expressly to show off the charms of one particular actress, only differing from the ordinary run by being in the now old-fashioned five acts, and in no other way remarkable, though the new theatre, having once got hold of it, seemed never tired of playing it. It was an essentially pathetic piece, and the excitable Linda Beresford had tears in her eyes long before Miss Lucia Lavington walked out of the artist's studio, saying, "You have taken from life itself all—all that made it worth the living."

"That is perfect acting," cried Percy Gordon wildly, "there is no fuss about

that. It is as simple as possible. Oh, I could love that girl!"

No one was in a mood to ridicule him, not even Beauregard, though the opportunity would have been irresistible under any other circumstances. As to Bertie, he was all eyes and ears, and all for Lucia Lavington; he had desperately made his way into the green room, only to be told that she had a private dressing-room, and never appeared there, and had come back disconsolate to feast his eyes upon her every movement. He felt mad with Gordon for saying so loudly of himself what must he thought be the case with every one who looked upon her, but he certainly was not the person to ridicule him. At last it was all over, and, after repeated calls for her, Blanche Beaumarchais re-appeared, led on by the manager himself, to receive a perfect volley of bouquets. She stooped to pick them up, and the graceful, simple way in which she did so, elicited a fresh burst of admiration.

There were too many for her even to attempt to carry away all, but the manager assisted, and while doing so, the curtain fell again.

"Oh, did you see her face, when she stooped to pick up the bouquets?" exclaimed the tearful Linda, "it changed so, such a sweet, tired look came over it. Oh, if I were a man, I would take her to St. George's to-morrow, if she would only let me, and never allow her to act again!"

"Because she does it so well?" asked Beauregard.

"She is very like somebody I once knew," said Captain Lorraine.

"She is the most beautiful creature I ever saw," exclaimed Percy Gordon, "and it is all real, every bit of her. My glasses are splendid ones, and I have been using them pretty nearly all the time. There is a dash of rouge of course, for the footlights, but nothing more, her complexion is perfect."

"She is altogether perfect," exclaimed Bertie furiously.

"But don't you see who she is so like, Gordon?" said Captain Lorraine again, "you must, surely, for it is a relation of yours."

"I never had a relation one tenth part so good looking."

"Not Florence Berkeley!"

"Oh, Florence was a pretty country girl—"

"A pretty country girl! The most beautiful girl—I—I mean, such an expression!"

"Nothing like this actress's. She looks as if she had gone through some great grief, and after that all the world had become indifferent to her."

"Yes, that is just how your cousin used to look. I never saw such a likeness. Come now, don't look offended about it. Of course I don't for a minute mean to suggest such an idea as that your cousin could possibly be acting on the London stage. By-the-bye though, where is she now? I have always meant to ask you."

"I don't know exactly where. The Boltons are in Mauritius still, and Florence is in England staying with friends, somewhere in the country. I forget where, exactly."

"Is she really? I had not heard of her for a long time; I used to know her at Ryde, when she was with Lady Bulmer, you know. Oh, by the way, there is little Mrs. Northwey! what a long time it is since I have seen her, I must really go and speak to her."

Captain Lorraine made his way to Mrs. Northwey's box: "How do you do? Well, of course you have been charmed, every one has."

"Oh, Captain Lorraine, did not you know her?"

"Know her! who do you mean?"

"Why, Miss Lucia Lavington, of course. I never thought that was her real name, but she is Florence Berkeley. Oh, you used to know her surely; I know you did."

"A wonderful likeness, is it not?"

"A likeness! it is she herself. I knew her directly she clasped her hands in that way, and stood so still with the tears running down her cheeks. That is just what she did when—when—"

"When? why when can you have seen her sufficiently agitated?"

"Oh, of course I did not mean to say I had seen her do it, only that is just the way she would do it. I was sure it was Florence Berkeley directly I saw her do that."

"But how could that make you sure? there is a wonderful likeness certainly, but equally certainly it is not Florence Berkeley. Gordon, who is her cousin, won't even acknowledge to the likeness; but the idea of its being really her is too absurd, she was the last girl in the world to do anything of the kind; and besides, though one does hear of men one knows going upon the stage sometimes for a freak, I never heard of a young lady doing so yet."

"No, but I am sure it is she. If it is not, where is she?"

"Oh, in the country somewhere, visiting friends, Gordon says. He was almost angry at my ever saying there was a likeness; I don't know what he would do if he heard you."

"That is just it," said Mrs. Northwey, with that quickness which Percy Gordon had at one time found such an agreeable change from Evelyn's slowness, "it is Florence Berkeley, and he does not want it known, and so he was angry when you talked about the likeness. Why should he be angry otherwise?"

"Oh, but I did not mean that he was angry exactly, only provoked; but it cannot be Miss Berkeley, I cannot bear the idea. I will get it out of Gordon to-morrow though, if it really is the case, we are going down to Windsor together, and if he knows, I will certainly get it out of him. It can't be Miss Berkeley though," he

added, almost angrily, after a few moments' reflection, "she was so natural, quite the very last person I could fancy acting well."

CHAPTER III.

SA GRÂCE, SA BEAUTÉ, CET HEUREUX DON DE PLAIRE.

PERCY GORDON and Captain Lorraine took the train down to Windsor next day, they had intended to drive, but they found themselves late for their appointment, and, as it was, only just got to the station in time.

"A close thing that," said the little post captain, (he had been promoted in the course of the three years, since we first made his acquaintance,) as they sprang panting into a carriage with the train already in motion. There was only one other man in it, a clergyman, of whom they took

but little notice, beginning immediately on their own topics, and one of the first topics was Miss Lucia Lavington.

"It is a face to haunt one," said Percy Gordon mournfully. "Wherever I look I seem to see that sweet pale resolute face."

"I don't wonder at its haunting you, Gordon. She is your cousin, and how you can let Miss Florence Berkeley—"

"Really, Lorraine, you must be mad. She has eyes and hair of much the same colour as Florence's, but otherwise she is altogether different. Taller, and paler, and with an expression—"

"That is just like Miss Florence Berkeley's. You can't remember her, Gordon. That is just her expression, and nobody could be paler than she was."

"You certainly must have seen her since I have."

"I saw her last at Ryde, just when you were expected there. Of course you saw her then!"

"Oh yes, I saw her," said Percy, "and I say that my cousin Florence Berkeley, though one of the sweetest girls I ever saw, was too short and thickly made, and that she had rosy cheeks and a bright beaming face. Pretty, certainly, but with no great beauty beside her eyes."

"And I say, that Miss Florence Berkeley had a perfect figure, and was if anything a trifle too pale, though I never thought so myself, and that she had every beauty under the sun, though her chief charm, I acknowledge, was her expression—not her eyes, mind, though they were beautiful, but her expression. Come, I say, Gordon, you are absurd, you can't have forgotten her so far? Have you a photograph of her? No! Well, I—I happen to have one. Now look here," and Captain Lorraine disengaged a gold locket, and handed it to him.

"How do you come to have her photograph in a locket?" asked Percy Gordon, suspiciously, without opening it.

"Oh—I got a photograph of her, and one day the mania seized me, and I had it coloured, and as I have never seen anything more beautiful yet, why I wear it in a locket," said Captain Lorraine, blushing like a school-girl, and most unlike a man of many London seasons, but then he was a sailor as well, and sailors are proverbial for retaining their freshness longer than other men.

"A perfectly beautiful face," said Percy, now opening the locket, "and not unlike Miss Lavington. I see now where you got that idea from, you have looked at this picture till it has quite effaced your recollection of the original. This is not the least like Florence, as I remember her," and Percy Gordon sighed.

"It is the very image of Miss Florence Berkeley, as I remember her, only it does not do her half justice."

"May I ask what Miss Berkeley it is that you are speaking of?" said the clergyman,

from the other end of the carriage. "I have been brought a good deal in contact with a Miss Berkeley lately, a singularly beautiful girl, and as good as she is beautiful. Perhaps I might be able to settle the question at issue between you."

Both the men seemed rather at a loss what to answer; they had completely forgotten his existence in the heat of their discussion, and the clergyman went on :—

"I am very much interested in Miss Berkeley, which must be my excuse for what might otherwise seem a somewhat impertinent interruption. Though entirely devoted to works of mercy, and thus saving herself in great measure from temptation, she seems to me too beautiful a girl to live alone in London, and I should be glad to hear of friends of hers."

"What is she like?" asked Captain Lorraine, to whom this remark seemed more particularly addressed.

"She is like a ministering angel, both in

her face and in her life. Night after night have I known her watch by some poor woman's sick bed, and she appears only to live in order to do good. Her face corresponds to her character, and many a poor creature has said to me that it was to Miss Berkeley's face, rather than to any spiritual ministrations, whether of myself or of others, that she attributed her first desire to rise to a better state."

"She would hardly be likely to be an actress, would she?" asked Captain Lorraine hesitatingly.

"An actress!" and the clergyman started in horror. "Have I not said that she is all that is good and pure? She would, like all truly converted persons, shun a theatre as she would a racecourse, both alike hotbeds of profanity. Not but that Miss Berkeley does yet seem to me too lax in her notions, but an actress!" and the clergyman gave a groan of disapproval.

"Is her name Florence?" asked Percy Gordon.

"I cannot be sure of her Christian name, never having seen her with anyone sufficiently intimate to address her by it, but I have received one or two notes from her, and to the best of my recollection—yes, I am sure they were signed F. Berkeley."

"But it cannot be she," said Captain Lorraine; "the more I think of it, the more sure I am that there cannot be two such creatures in the world, and it must have been Florence Berkeley we saw acting last night, at the New Theatre."

"Perhaps—if you would allow me to look at that photograph? Ah, yes, this is Miss Berkeley, I should know her anywhere. Her beautiful face is not easily forgotten."

"Then was not she acting at the New Theatre last night?" asked Captain Lorraine, "does not she go by the name of Lucia Lavington?"

"Certainly not, sir. I am astonished at

your asking such a question. She is a good Christian girl. But what name did the guard say? Ealing! why this is my station. Dear, dear, how near I was to being carried on. Will you allow me, sir?" And having collected his packages, he just succeeded in alighting before the train moved on again.

"Where is your Miss Berkeley living?" Percy Gordon called out after him, and the clergyman called back something, but what it was neither of the two men could make out.

"You see you were wrong, Lorraine, and my cousin Florence has not turned actress, but sister of mercy instead, a much more natural course for her to pursue."

"She cannot be a regular sister of mercy to cotton with that fellow, he is as low as my hat. He talked of her being alone too, I thought you said she was paying visits."

"I thought she was. Probably this is only a temporary measure, she always had a great turn for visiting the poor, or per-

haps she is paying a visit here to somebody she has been kind to—that Mrs. Cholmondeley, whom she chose to go and nurse at Ryde, or somebody of that kind. She always had a great turn for doing good, indeed I have never known a better girl," and a deep sigh followed this remark.

Captain Lorraine sighed too. "Yes, she was too good for anyone. Do you know, Gordon, I once wanted her to be my wife? but it would have required a second Sir Charles Grandison to win her, and I am better suited as I am. I did not see all that at the time though, and I was terribly hard hit."

"So was I once," said Percy, but in such a low tone his companion did not hear him.

"Of course it was madness to think she could ever take to acting," Captain Lorraine went on, "but it was Mrs. Northwey put me up to thinking so by being so positive."

"Oh, Mrs. Northwey never knew Florence, and she is always jumping at con-

clusions that are just as often wrong as right."

That night Percy Gordon went to the New Theatre again. "There is just a resemblance to Florence," he thought to himself, after he had studied Miss Lavington all the evening. "I believe that is the great charm to me, or else surely I could not feel so foolish about her. After all I have never cared for any girl like that girl, I wonder where she is now, I wish that stupid old parson had told me, so that I could hear, however, she is sure to be all right, wherever she is," and then Percy turned his thoughts to Lucia Lavington, and thought no more of Florence Berkeley, for he was in love again now, and Florence was only that first love, whom all men are ready enough to dismiss from their minds, in order to make place for the last.

Poor Percy Gordon, it was not for nothing that he had gained that sorrowful

smile and air, which took so well in Belgravia. All the bitterness that living beyond his means entails upon a man he had known at a very early age, and then he had got through more roughing in the course of a few years, than many men are ever called upon to go through in the whole course of their lives, more than he could stand certainly, for his health had never again quite recovered from it. Since that, for a long time he had been nursing a delicate wife, whom he did not love, but who idolized him, and whose strength visibly failed, if he left her for a moment. It was nursing her that had perhaps given the last perfect finish to his now so very perfect smile; he had grown almost to love her before she died, poor patient Evelyn, fading away like a beautiful hot-house flower transplanted to a colder atmosphere, and he had been very patient with her, even trying to train her mind a little, and teach her to care at least a little for something

besides himself; though Evelyn never really learnt to do this, she learnt to care for some things, but not for themselves, only for his sake. He was hasty with her sometimes, and lookers on might have said, that he was a very faulty husband, for there was more than one woman with whom his name was mixed up in a somewhat questionable manner during this time, but considering all things he was a very good husband to stupid beautiful Evelyn, who died believing in him, and loving him just as much as when she first joined her fortunes to his in far away Brisbane.

Percy Gordon mourned for her very truly. As soon as she was taken from him he began to see her loveliness, and to value her love; it was dreary work to him coming home at night fall, and not finding two glowing, wistful eyes looking out for him, and a soft hand always ready to caress him, and a sweet voice that called him "dear Percy." He missed her very much, and

sometimes said sorrowfully to himself, that there had not been a thought in her but of good, and if she had been stupid it could hardly be said to have been her fault, and no one had regretted it more often or more sadly than herself. Besides no one can have everything, she had been good and lovely and loving, and what could a man wish for more? Still he had wished for more all the time he had had her gentle presence in his home, and he could not forget this all at once, nor did he in the least wish to pass himself off for an inconsolable young widower, but the world found him with a sorrowful smile, and soft sad voice, and the world vowed he was inconsolable, and longed therefore all the more to do what it could towards accomplishing the impossibility. The world's attempt to do so was in no ways distasteful to Percy Gordon, but it was not sufficiently long since Evelyn's death for him to think it quite good taste even to play at making love yet,

and no one had up to this time touched his heart, so he paid no court to anyone in return for all the court that was paid to him.

Now all at once Lucia Lavington touched his heart, in a manner that he could hardly have believed possible ; without even having spoken to her, he was more in love with her than he had ever been with any woman. Up to this time he had no desire like that of Bertram Beresford to make her acquaintance ; he feared to have the illusion dispelled, and rather than risk losing it, he preferred to worship her at a distance. He dreaded lest to her as to other women his sweet smile and soft tones might be at once irresistible ; it pleased him to go to the theatre and see with what difficulty she made up her mind to marry Lord Richman in the piece, gentlemanly and handsome though he was, and by no means deficient in the charm of manner, for it gave him the idea that she might be more difficult to

please than other women, still he did not feel sure, and he feared to have his illusion dispelled by making her acquaintance. Percy Gordon, like many other fascinating men before him, wished that women "could be fair and yet not fond;" the easiness of their conquest took off a great deal from their fairness in his eyes. Men he found much more difficult to please, not that men did not like him, but they asked more of him, they required him either to be well up in politics, or a good shot, or cool rider, or at the very least a fair hand at pool or whist, as well as a pleasant companion. Now Percy Gordon knew quite well he was a pleasant companion, so he liked to try his hand at these various pursuits, and show he could do something at them too, though no one of them was the thing he chiefly cared about, as with so many of the men he came across, and with all the men he cared about.

For he did care about men. Though men

and women alike thought him best suited to the latter, he preferred men in his secret soul, men with some stability about them, who went in thoroughly for some one or other of the many things he tried to excel in, all in their turn, after his own dilettante fashion. He was great friends with Captain Lorraine, but more for the dear old profession's sake than for anything else, for though the little post-captain was a capital fellow, he was essentially little, quite as little in his tastes as in his stature, by which I do not mean to imply that these tastes were at all low, far from it, but simply that they were trivial, and suited to the little man. Percy was friends with him, because he was a good little fellow partly, but chiefly because they had been messmates together in the good old ship, the last in which Percy ever sailed wearing Her Majesty's uniform. Those old jovial naval days were very sweet to him now in recollection; whilst they had lasted he had grumbled quite as much as

most naval officers grumble, and they are most of them rather good at that, but he had enjoyed them very much notwithstanding. He had hated keeping watch, such a farce too, as it was in harbour; and, above all, he had hated Saturday cleaning up, but he had loved his ship always, and those had been pleasant, happy-go-lucky days that he had spent afloat. Oh, what a jolly time of it they had had running up to Mauritius from the Cape, and on his last commission what rare rides and exciting shooting they had had in Syria! The knocking about Malta harbour had been poor work enough after that, though there had been charms in that too, and more than one well-contested boat-race, and then the summer cruise round the Italian and French ports! Could there anywhere be a lovelier earthly paradise than Palermo, and was there ever such a place for picnics as much regretted Spezzia! It was all joyous in the looking back; the miseries of washing decks, and being tied

to hours, and of dreary pacings in the chill night air, when the lieutenant of the watch happened to be a strict one, all that had passed away from his remembrance. So anything connected with the old sea times had a peculiar charm for Percy Gordon, and in this way he came to be friends with smart, easy-going little Captain Lorraine, otherwise his friends were of a different class.

The men he cared about were Stanley, commander in the guard-ship, at the Nore, who had passed for lieutenant with three I's after his name, no usual feat in these days of brain-exhausting examinations, and who was the eldest son of a good old Cumberland family with a splendid place in the lake country, but was heart and soul in the service, and preferred being afloat on the worst station going to reposing under the shade of his ancestral trees. He had interest, and generally managed to be on the best station, and might now indeed have been in the Victoria and Albert, and so sure

of his Post next year, only he had preferred serving under his cousin, knowing the Post would come soon enough, but all this is neither here nor there. If he had had no interest at all, he would have stuck by the service just the same, and he would talk by the hour together of cupolas and rams, and new coatings for ships' bottoms, or more shoppy still, he would discuss the regulations of a Watch-bill with as much interest as that with which a musical amateur would discuss the libretto of an opera; and Percy Gordon liked to listen to him, and would talk also on these professional topics, and proffer his own opinion, just as if he had not left the Navy years ago, and would rejoice not a little when able to show that his opinion was the right one, and by no means to be laughed down, as Commander Stanley was a little by way of laughing down the opinions of non-professionals, whom he did not consider qualified to judge about naval mysteries. He liked to hear

Percy Gordon's opinion, finding it had often some reason in it, but he considered him still a wild, foolish fellow, just as he had been accustomed to think him, when years ago now, they had been together at the naval college, where Percy had struck every one as so clever, but so destitute of application. He liked Gordon, but he did not care for him, as Percy cared for Stanley, considering him his best friend, and praising him through thick and thin, but then Commander Stanley fully deserved this kind of praise, whereas, whether Percy did or not, is a question.

Howard de Courcy, the pre-Raphaelite artist, who painted assiduously, though his pictures never sold, was another great friend of Percy's; their friendship had begun at Rome, and was kept up now in London, where Percy made a charming listener to the other's diatribes against the partiality shown by the Academy hangers, and delighted Howard not a little by the justice

of his remarks on the "nursery-art" of the day. Percy never ventured to make a remark on Howard's own pictures, for he saw that his friend was a man with an idea, which he was determined to carry out some day, and Percy admired him accordingly; besides, there was no doubt but that Howard's colouring was wonderful—even the Academicians acknowledged that. So was Captain Curzon another of Percy's friends; in spite of his tremendous size he was as good a man across country as any you could pick out in the Shires, and thought no music equal to the music of the hounds. So was Jervis, the great traveller, who did not write a book about it, but travelled for the sake of travelling, and thought nothing of any man who had not been at least once round the world, and not much of him then. So was Bertram Beresford; as good a sportsman as any man need care to be, and, though only a guardsman as yet, a keener politician than half the men who go in for

politics and nothing else, besides being half mad about political economy, and having a grand enthusiasm about pretty near everything. So unfortunately was Lord Lansdon, with his first-rate stud of race-horses, and intimate knowledge of the turf, and all its mysteries.

All these men Percy Gordon cared more for than any or all of the women he met about Belgravia, for the men expected more of him, and would not, he knew, care to speak to him, unless he could go at least a little way with them in their various hobbies, and he enjoyed showing off to one how he too could sometimes back the right horse, and to another that he was knowing about naval matters, and to a third how he also had seen something of foreign parts, besides being able to pick holes in a new picture, or knock down a grouse, or occasionally tell when the ministry was going out. He could do all this wonderfully well, considering he was only an amateur at it

after all, and he was proud of this, and liked to show off to his men friends. Women admired him too readily, and his *bêtises* quite as much as his *bons mots*, indeed they seemed to think he showed talent in every word and act, and very few of them could themselves do anything decidedly better than he could, or applied themselves to any one thing in particular. Now he had come across Miss Lavington, who had taken to acting in all seriousness, and acted inimitably. She had a sweet face too, and was supremely beautiful as seen before the foot-lights, becomingly dressed. How she looked at other times Percy as yet knew not, but he thought it was her first-rate acting that made him so mad about her, that or the likeness to Florence, which seemed to increase as he watched her, and after all Florence was the only girl he had ever really cared for up to this time. But he did not think much about Florence now, as he gazed at Lucia Lavington, and listened

to her soft clear voice. He was fast growing to be passionately in love with her, and all other women and even men were becoming uninteresting in comparison. The time was not far hence when Percy Gordon himself would be as completely absorbed as any of the men, his friends.

CHAPTER IV.

"DEH, FOSSI TU MEN BELLA, O ALMEN PIU FORTE!"

In a small, simply-furnished, third-rate London sitting-room, sat Florence Berkeley, easily to be recognised by us, who know her well, and yet a good deal altered since we last saw her at Ryde in white muslin and blue ribbons, a bridesmaid at her sister's wedding. Her beauty is grown more statuesque than of old, she seems to have developed, and the expression of her face has gained in intensity, a strangely resolute expression; it is the expression of one who would dare and do anything, an expression

more befitting a soldier, whose duty it is to die at his post, than a young English girl in this nineteenth century, when no one would think there was any need for Joans of Arc, and such like. She is sitting in a strange attitude too, straight upright in her chair, with her hands stretched far out upon her knees, and tightly clasped, her eyes fixed upon the opposite wall; perhaps it is in part the attitude, and the simple grey dress fitting tight to her, and showing the outline of her figure through its own soft folds, that makes her look so statuesque. She is thinking hard too, and more statues look like that, than living women in real life, though perhaps that is only because living women in real life retire into their private chambers or boudoirs before indulging in the exercise, while statues carry it on indifferently in deserted galleries, or in "the busy haunts of men."

Anyhow Florence Berkeley is thinking hard now, and she seems to have arrived

at some conclusion in her thoughts, for she rises after a little in a quiet, business-like manner, as if she had thought out what she had got to think about, and not at all as if she were putting her thoughts away from her, as too many of us do in disgust at our own incapacity to see to the end of them, and gathering together some lovely hot-house flowers, she proceeds to arrange them in a vase upon the centre table of the little room. Those flowers are the only ornament the room possesses, for even the vase in which they are now placed is of the commonest description, but Florence arranges them carefully and tenderly, as if she knew well that ornament had its value ; then she sits down to the piano, and sings a merry little song. Over and over again she sings it with a face beaming with smiles, till at last the clock strikes, then at once the piano is closed, and simultaneously the smiles vanish also. Looking at her now, at her grave thoughtful face, it is almost

impossible to believe it is the same, that was but now radiant with the light of happiness. It is as if some fairy had cast a spell over her.

Florence takes the flowers she has so carefully arranged, and moves out of the room with them, out of the room and down the stairs with that soft gliding step, only learnt by many weary watchings in the chambers of the sick, then she raises a curtain, behind that opens a door, and the next moment enters a room darkened for sickness, and laden with the scent of vinegar. There on the bed lies a dark, wild-looking woman, with fine features, now deadly pale and attenuated with illness; one long thin hand stretched out upon the bed clothes, the other tossing restlessly about the pillows. After a few whispered words the night nurse glides away, and Florence takes her place by Mrs. Cholmondeley's bed-side.

"How are you, dearest? poor dear, have

you had a very restless night? see, are these not beautiful flowers? I have brought them here for you to enjoy them for a little, before the scent gets too strong for you."

The large dark eyes are turned upon the flowers, and then upon Florence with a grateful glance, but no word is uttered. Death is written upon every line of the dark pale handsome face; sad to see that the young lovely face, that bends over it, is paler still; Florence stoops and kisses the poor hot forehead, and the dark dog-like eyes look at her lovingly, but wonderingly as well. The mind seems already to have forsaken its frail tenement, and though Mrs. Cholmondeley holds it for a moment or two, she soon lets drop the lovely rose, that Florence has put into her hand. Then Florence takes a book she has brought with her, and reads it, every now and then pausing to bathe the invalid's brow with vinegar, or fan her, or do any of those nameless little offices affection prompts, more for the

sake of doing something, than because of any good they seem likely to effect.

After some hours passed in this way there was a knock at the door. "The doctor, ma'am," and a young man, plain but with a bright and strikingly clever face, entered. Florence went forward to meet him, and he recognising her, seemed surprised to do so.

"I did not expect to find you here, Miss Berkeley, but poor Mrs. Cholmondeley is certainly as fitting an object for charity, as anyone else now, and you seem untiring in your exertions."

"It is affection not charity, that leads me to be her nurse," replied Florence looking lovingly at the poor sufferer.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Dr. Grayling, not a whit abashed. Then he advanced and examined the sick woman, and after a few short medical questions and answers Florence took him away to the little sitting-room to deliver his opinion.

"Are you a relation?" he asked in his usual abrupt style.

"No, only a friend." What a mockery there often is in that word "only!"

"Then I may as well tell you at once that there is no hope. Probably you know that already though."

"I feared so," but Florence turned a shade paler, and sat down at once, leaning her head on her hand.

"She may last a day or two longer, but I don't think she will live over to-morrow. Why—Miss Berkeley, are you ill?"

For Florence's head was sinking lower and lower, and it was evident she was fainting. Dr. Grayling dashed some of the water, with which she had been refreshing her flowers, in her face, and laid her down upon the sofa, and in a few minutes she began to recover. "I have seen you in such horrible places," he said, "I had no idea you could be so easily upset. Mrs. Cholmondeley is not a great friend, I hope."

"She is all I have got," said Florence, smiling sadly with lips, that were still ash-coloured.

The young doctor, who was both hardy and clever, and rather enjoyed a tussle with the world than otherwise, looked down upon the pale, beautiful girl, and wondered a little. For the first time it came home to him, that though life is, as Vauvenargues says, "what it ought to be for an active being, that is to say, fertile in obstacles," yet there might be some beings, and those by no means the worst, for whom these said obstacles were not so well suited.

But Florence had recovered herself by this time, and she rose calm and resolute once more. "I must go back to her now. When will you call again?"

"It is really no use. I will come again, if you wish it, of course, but it is really no use."

"I had rather you would. I am knocked up this morning, and not myself, the responsibility would be quite too much for

me, if I did not think you would call again. Will you come to-morrow morning early? Thanks, good morning," and she went back to the sick room again.

She went and stood by Mrs. Cholmondeley's bed-side gazing at the wan, wasted face, and as she gazed one or two tears rolled slowly down her cheek, but she did not seem to heed them, and no more tears followed those first ones, as she stood and gazed on her dying friend. "All that she had," poor Florence!

How long she stood there she did not know, but at last there was another knock at the door, so heavily curtained, to exclude as far as possible all noise from the outside world. "A gentleman wants to see you, miss. He says he must see you, and he won't detain you any time, he only wants to ask you a question. Shall I watch by the poor lady, miss? I have brought my work in case you should be kept."

"Oh, I shall not stay long away. Thanks,

Jane; but what sort of a gentleman? did he give no name?"

"No, miss, he gave no name. He is a lord, I can see by his carriage, and he is not the same lord as came the other day; quite old this one is, with white hair."

"Oh, old is he?" said Florence with a sigh of relief. "Then I will go and see him, if you will just watch by Mrs. Cholmondeley till I come back, I won't be long. There is nothing to be done but to give her water when she asks for it, and put fresh ice to her forehead every now and then. The bathing it only worries her, Dr. Grayling says. I will be back directly."

"I wonder who it is," thought Florence to herself as she went upstairs, and then she opened the door of the little sitting-room, and to her amazement found there Lord Bulmer, who seemed hardly less surprised at seeing her.

"Florence, my dear child," he exclaimed, "this is fortunate. I came here on the chance

of Mrs. Cholmondeley knowing where you were, and then I heard she was very ill, and that you had never been here, but there was a young lady nursing her, and then I thought she might possibly be able to tell me something, and after all it turns out to be yourself. My dear, I have missed you sadly," and Lord Bulmer kissed her again and again in a nervous, frightened way, that made Florence feel almost ready to cry. He was dreadfully aged since she had seen him last, and told him she should never forget what he had done—never, never. He seemed to remember their last parting all at once, or possibly to be chilled by her silence now, for Florence could not trust herself to speak. In her then excited, worn out state she was afraid of crying at the change in him, so she kept silence, and he began again in a different manner. "I daresay you think that I treated you badly, you and Fanny, but I meant it for the best —indeed I did, my dear child. I thought

that marriage would be the ruin of you both, but I have been very sorry about it since. I am afraid I was harsh, and I have been very sorry about it, for I have been ill, Florence child, very ill, and I shall never be the man I was again, and I have had plenty of time to be sorry in. Well, and how are they, Fanny and her husband, are they with you?"

"No, Uncle Henry; they are in Mauritius still."

"Yes, yes, I remember now. They went out to Mauritius, to be sure. My memory is getting very bad, sometimes I am afraid it will fail me altogether. You hear from them, of course. Do they get on together as well as they expected?"

"Yes, I think they do. Fanny always writes as if she could not say too much that was good of him, but she is wonderfully changed since her marriage, and grown much more religious, and—I think it vexes her that Harry is not more so too."

"Ah! he still swears like a trooper, does he? And their money, how does that hold out?"

"Oh, they have had dreadful money troubles, I am sure of that, though Fanny always tries to say as little about them as possible; but Harry has written to me once or twice, and when the first baby was born, he wrote as if he were quite crushed. He said he had not felt his debts as a single man, but with a wife and child he did not know how to bear them."

"But they get on well?—They don't quarrel?"

"Oh, no, that I am sure of. They love each other just as much as ever, if not more, and I still think that that is what matters more than anything," said Florence, looking up with a bright smile, that just lighted up her pale face for a moment, and then passed away like a glint of sunshine on a showery day.

"Yes—yes, you are right there," said

Lord Bulmer uneasily; "and Florence, child, you will come home with me, now I have found you, won't you? This is no place for you," and he glanced round at the bare walls and shabby furniture.

"I am only here nursing Mrs. Cholmondeley. I don't live here."

"Oh, don't you?—and you went to nurse her at Ryde too. People said that was for Mr. Thornton, but I never thought so; I never thought any harm of you, for I took to your face from the first, only Mary set me against you once. Perhaps she was jealous of you, because you were so beautiful, but then she was never jealous of poor Fanny, and Fanny was the most admired, but somehow you and Mary never hit it off together, you never did suit each other. But I would see that it was right now, and you have never turned Papist after all, have you?"

"No; I only meet Mr. Thornton very rarely now amongst the poor people. He

is a very zealous priest, but in a different part mostly to that which I visit."

"Is he? They say he is so sick of fine ladies, he won't even speak to a woman now, if she has ever been seen in gloves. All the same I met him at Lady Tremblin's the other night. He did not know where you lived, he said, but he met you sometimes, and he gave me Mrs. Cholmondeley's address to find you out through her. I thought perhaps he might meet you here, for people said you went to stay with her at Ryde in order to see more of him, as if you were not free enough with us! No; want of liberty was never the fault in my house. But you will come and live with us again now?"

"No, thank you very much, Uncle Henry, but I cannot now. Too late," she added to herself with a sigh.

"You bear malice, then?"

"No, indeed, Uncle Henry."

"Then come and stay with us—for a little

at all events. Not to live, if you do not like that, but to stay. Oh, Florence, I have many lonely hours now."

"Have you, Uncle Henry? I am so sorry," and the deep blue eyes filled with tears. Florence was very easily moved that morning. "But it is impossible I should go to stay with you at present."

"Ah!" he said, "you always were that way, so religious, and so high church. You think your vocation is in town, I suppose."

Florence hesitated, then she said firmly:

"My calling binds me to stay in town for the present."

"But you will come some day—some day, surely? Fix your time now, won't you? so that I may have something definite to look forward to."

"In three months then, if you will have me." She knew she was prevaricating, for she felt sure herself, that he would not have her then, but she could not let him go away comfortless, poor broken-down old

man, into which the once stately self-satisfied Lord Bulmer had grown as by a miracle. At least such it seemed to Florence, who had not seen it gradually coming about.

"That is right now. Must you really go, my child? Is poor Mrs. Cholmondeley so very ill? But you will write to me, you will write to me then before the three months are over, and tell me when to expect you? Oh yes, we shall both be very glad to see you, but you will write to me?"

"Yes, I will write to you, dear Uncle Henry, before the three months are over, and ask you whether you will have me, but I must say good-bye now, for though the maid I have left with Mrs. Cholmondeley is very obliging, and a nice good girl, yet she would not quite know what to do if—if anything were wanted," said Florence, hurriedly. "So good-bye, I hope you will not be ill again, but get quite strong soon

now. I am so glad we are friends once more."

"Yes, yes, always your friend, Florence; though we did have a quarrel once about poor Fanny. And you are doing well, my child? you look sadly pale!"

"I am doing very well, though, thank you. It was always my way to be pale, you know, and London air does not give anybody roses."

"No, no, that it does not. I am going out of town to-morrow myself. Mary is gone already, and I had hoped to take you down with me; but God bless you, my child, you will come soon, won't you? Oh, I am not the man I was, and I am often very lonely now, Florence, child!" and so saying, Lord Bulmer went slowly and carefully down the steep staircase, leaving Florence to go back to her sick friend with her heart yet fuller than it had been before.

"I am afraid I have kept you a long time, Jane, but the gentleman was my

uncle, and I had not seen him for a long time."

"Oh, never mind, Miss, I hope you did not hurry away. Your uncle, was he now, really? he looked such a fine gentleman," said Jane, evidently surprised at her owning such a grand relation. "The poor lady has been lying quite quiet, she seems in a sort of doze like, and I'll tell you what you had best do, Miss; you had best go and take a doze yourself, for you look very near as bad as she. I have got this petticoat to run up, and I may just as well do it sitting beside her as anywhere, so do you just go and lie down, Miss. I'll waken you up, if ever she stirs."

"Thank you, but I could not rest. I grudge every moment that is spent away from her, she has been such a kind, true friend to me, through many troubles," and Florence sat down beside Mrs. Cholmondeley, and cried bitterly, as soon as the maid had left her. Her only friend was being

taken away from her, and now here was Lord Bulmer wishing to become her friend again, but it was too late now—too late, and she wept bitterly. But again she was disturbed; this time it was Mr. Augustus Stevens, who had called to ask how his sister was, and would not be satisfied with the maid's answer, so Jane was left once more to go on with her petticoat, by Mrs. Cholmondeley's bedside, and Florence went to the little sitting room to see Mr. Augustus Stevens. He was small for a man, whereas his sister was tall for a woman, but in other respects he was very like her, with the same fine features and the same wild, dark eyes.

"Forgive my troubling you, *belle dame*," said he, with a somewhat theatrical air, "but I wished to hear from yourself how our poor Magdalene is."

"She is no better," said Florence, gravely.

"Alas! is it even so? you need say no more. I understand that it is with my

poor sister, as one day or another it will be with each one of us, but meanwhile we have to live. For me, I am now established, I have got an engagement at Covent Garden, and after that another at Berlin, I consider myself a made man, and have no longer any fears about my future, but you, *belle dame*, what will you do? you will not surely continue to live in London, entirely unprotected?"

"What else can I do?" asked Florence, sadly. "It is not easy to replace a friend, and for some time past now, she has been my only friend. I have no choice."

"Have you indeed no choice? Believe me," said the little man, dropping the heroic tone, which seemed to have been assumed chiefly to cover his agitation, and speaking in simple, earnest, manly wise, "Believe me, you will never find one who loves you more devotedly than he who now stands before you. Every pulse in my being beats but to do you service. You must long

have seen how I have worshipped you in silence—"

"No, no," interposed poor Florence.

"No!" said he, "you have not seen it? then must I have dissembled well. Do not think that I am ignorant what an unworthy wooer I am for you. Were my sister likely to recover, believe me I would never have spoken to you a word of my love, but now that I see you lonely and friendless, I ask you, in return for all the love I have poured forth at your feet, to give me a husband's right to protect you. I put in no claim for your love—of that I know myself to be unworthy, but I am a man, and were I your husband, I could protect you; and beautiful and to be desired as you are, you need protection," and the little man's face grew almost heroic as he spoke. "Our marriage might even be a secret one, if you wished it. Such is my trust in you, that though I know you are courted already on all sides, and soon to be yet more beset, I

would throw no impediment in the way of your career, content if only I had a husband's right to protect you when you needed protection."

"Thank you," said Florence, and she held out her hand to him, and was silent for a moment. Then she withdrew it, and said, "I understand the spirit in which you ask me to be your wife, and I thank you, but you must think of it no more, for it can never be. Some day," she went on, with a still melancholy smile, "you will show me the young, lovely bride you will have won for yourself, and who will love you as you deserve to be loved, and then perhaps I may ask her for her protection, but yours I cannot have."

"Never will the day arrive on which I shall show you my bride. When I first called you the *belle dame sans merci,* I little thought the title was so truly applicable, but be it so. I will never press my love upon you, only know that though I may not

speak of it to you, my love will be always present with me, and when my strains entrance the proud West End beauties, it is not their charms that will inspire me, but yours, the recollection of which will make them all alike indifferent to me, be they held as suns in their own spheres, or do they shine with the chastened radiance of the moonbeams, whose light has been, and will ever be, the light after my own heart," and the little man bowed before her, as though she were an enchanted princess, and he a fairy prince, and both before the footlights. "'Farewell, if ever fondest prayer'—you know the remainder, it is unnecessary for me to quote farther," and falling on one knee, he kissed the hand which Florence had not the heart to refuse to him, then made as though he would go, but in true operatic style, going, yet never gone, and turned back as he reached the door. "Ah, if I could but know you safe from the assaults of men who may feign to love as truly, but who, despite

all the grandeur of the coroneted summits, on which they recline, will never make you as happy as you might be in the obscure but peaceful plains of middle life!"

"I shall never marry Lord Mincington, if you mean that."

"Do you deign to tell me so, and may I believe my ears?"

"Certainly you may. He has never offered to me, and perhaps I ought not therefore to speak of his doing so as even a possible event, but if it is any thought of him that disturbs you, you may rest easy."

"Oh, what a weight you have taken off my mind! If it had not been for the thought that his golden words and golden gifts might lure you into becoming his wife, I do not know that I should ever have presumed to importune you by a revelation of my own feelings, unworthy wretch that I am. But that stirred me on, and led me to presume so far, that and my new appointment which made me know I should hence-

forward be a rich man, and able, if you would but have allowed me, to strew your path with the luxuries that are only your due."

"I need no luxuries, and no golden gifts will ever lead me to be anybody's wife, for I receive no gifts," said Florence, proudly, and almost sternly. "And indeed I think I shall never marry," she added after a moment, partly because she felt the wish never to marry so very strongly at that moment, but more because as she had to refuse what he wanted to the little man, she wished to show herself as kind as possible to him, by confiding in him, or in any other way. For she grieved much at the pain she was inflicting, knowing well her wooer's sterling worth, in spite of that strange manner which he shared in common with most of Magdalene's family.

"Oh, I pray that you may marry, I pray that you may, though your wedding-day will be a bitter day for me. But you are

too young and too lovely to live alone, and you will be so hard pressed soon. Some gallant gentleman will surely some day overcome your scruples, and I pray only that he may be worthy of you, and love you half as truly as Augustus Stevens loves you. My poor Magdalene!" he added abruptly, "will it disturb her if I go in to see her now, or is she past that?"

"She is past that," said Florence sadly, "and she will not know you."

Then she led the way into the sick room, and Augustus Stevens took his last farewell of his sister, for he was engaged to sing at Covent Garden that night, and she might not last till morning.

CHAPTER V.

"ONCE—AND NOW NOTHING."

Mrs. Northwey flirted desperately with Percy Gordon now, desperately; for he did not seem to care for her, and she did care for him, and had at last quite decided that Florence Berkeley had done her an evil turn long ago at Ryde, a good turn to Percy Gordon, but to herself a very evil turn, for surely anything was better than being Captain Northwey's decoy, and then being sworn at and ill-used, as her recompense for the evil deeds to which she degraded herself to lend her aid. Mrs. Northwey was desperate, and as she could

not entice Percy away from the New Theatre, she went with him there, and made love to him, and tried to win some promise of love from him, of the least little portion of his love, trying as if it were her last hope.

It was she now who alluded to those days at Ryde, and asked him why he had never come again to see her, and Percy in his turn asked her if she regretted it, and Mrs. Northwey looked at him, and then Percy took hold of her hand, but he said nothing, he was looking at Lucia Lavington. Then Mrs. Northwey looked at her too, and spoke in cold hard tones, saying how like she was to his Cousin Florence Berkeley, and asking did he love his cousin still, she knew he had once loved her. And Percy said: Oh no, that was quite a young affair, when they were both almost children, and seemed surprised that she should know anything about it, but Mrs. Northwey did not explain how she

came by her knowledge, and all the while "Noblesse oblige" went on being played before them, and those of the audience who had not heard it before, and some of those who had, were moved to tears at the pathetic parts, just as they themselves had been the first time of seeing it, but they were hardened now, and Percy's most violent feeling was a sullen hatred of Mr. Richter, when at last the happy consummation was arrived at, a sullen hatred that made him turn more lovingly to Mrs. Northwey, as if thus to revenge himself on Miss Lavington for looking so far satisfied with only Mr. Richter. She never looked quite satisfied, decidedly those two last scenes were her weak point.

Mrs. Northwey saw that something, she knew not what, had turned the tide in her favour, and she immediately set to work to make the most of it. A meeting was arranged between them for the next morning, in that desolate part of Kensington

Gardens, by the large piece of water, where the fashionable world does not love to wander, and where even nurse-maids and children are rarely to be found. There was no object in the meeting, he might just as well have paid a morning call at the pretty little house near the park, where their *tête-à-tête* would have been quite as little likely to be disturbed, but there was something in the mere fact of a secret appointment that seemed to answer her ends, for she was desperate, and she did not intend that that pretty little house should long be her home; besides she could not quite bring herself to plan the leaving it under its very shelter, with the chance of her husband at any moment coming in to interrupt the conversation. He had taken to beating her of late, and that maddened her even more than the cruel words he had long been wont to use to her, and which, as she had long ago told Florence at Ryde, when they were said to her, made her not know

what she answered. She answered worse and worse things every day now, and she felt worse and worse feelings towards her husband, till she had grown to be frightened of herself, and to long to take refuge with Percy Gordon, who was so altogether different from Captain Northwey, and had known the troubles of her married life for a long time now, and had always been kind and sympathising, and never seemed shocked whatever she told him of herself. She never thought of taking refuge with her own people, she loved them very dearly, but she had never told them anything of her troubles, and they were so strict in their ideas, they would be sure to think it must be greatly her fault that she had to leave her husband, and then they would be greatly shocked, and show that they were so, and Katie, who had been accustomed to be held precious by them as the very apple of their eye, thought she could never bear this. Percy Gordon did not talk to her as

if there was any disgrace to herself in her troubles, and she was almost mad with them now, and she loved him, she thought, so she made that appointment for the next day.

Percy regretted it when he went home, and could think about it alone ; he had been at two balls since the theatre, each for a little time, but the meeting with Mrs. Northwey next day was uppermost in his mind, when he found himself alone, and he regretted it. He knew quite well what this meeting meant, and what it involved, and he regarded it as rather a nuisance than otherwise. No ideas of right and wrong troubled him about it, they had never been much to him since the old days when he and Florence Berkeley had cared for each other, "long ago, when they were both almost children." Then the two had talked about right and wrong a good deal together, and Florence had almost persuaded Percy into thinking them matters of primary im-

portance, but after that he had gone to Australia, and forgotten a good many things. Now he thought of honour as much as most men, and of the distinction between right and wrong as little, and he thought that Captain Northwey by his conduct towards her had long ago released Mrs. Northwey from the obligation of her marriage vows, and that he himself was being rather magnanimous than otherwise in thinking of burdening himself with the care of an unhappy foolish woman, for whom he had always had rather a fancy, but whom he had never really loved, for though he meant to go through with it, he still looked upon her as a burden.

He did not hurry himself in any way next morning to get to his appointment in Kensington Gardens, and when he arrived at the place fixed on, he was surprised to see Mrs. Northwey nowhere near, surprised and somewhat indignant ; then his indignation gave place to a feeling of relief, as he

waited, and waited, and still she did not come, but by degrees the feeling of relief passed away also, as he began to reflect that in all probability she was only detained by some one or other of Captain Northwey's whims, and that the meeting, or something tantamount, would have to take place just the same some other day. He was engaged to dine at Captain Northwey's that night, and then he would probably hear the explanation of her having failed to keep her appointment in the morning.

In the evening he did dine at the Northweys', but the party was a very small one, and no opportunity presented itself for an explanation, only when he said to her once: "Why did not you come?" she whispered: "I could not," and he noticed she looked very white and scared all the evening, and held herself aloof from everyone.

The play was very high that night, and Percy Gordon lost. "You must have your revenge, Gordon," said Captain Northwey,

and Percy, who was excited and flushed with play, said, "Yes," and soon it was settled that he should have his revenge the next evening. Mrs. Northwey grew whiter, and looked even more frightened at this, and she actually murmured something about people never getting their revenge at cards, but she spoke very low, so that no one heard her except Percy Gordon, who was accustomed to listen for her voice, and even he paid very little attention to these words of hers.

The next night they played, not at Captain Northwey's house, but at his Club, and the play was even higher than the night before, and again Percy lost.

"Well, perhaps you won't care to try your luck again now," said Captain Northwey in the heavy sneering tones that always riled Percy, and he immediately replied:

"Oh yes, I'll try my luck again to-morrow, if you all agree."

"You had better not," said one of the other players, and at this Percy fired up, and said:

"Why not, he should like to know? The luck had been against him these two nights, but there was no reason why it should always continue to be so."

"Well then, double or quits," said the other man; Lord Lansdon that was, he always played a venturous game, and some people said would any day rather lose a big sum, than only gain a small one. Hedging was not in his line, and there were beginning to be doubts about him on the turf.

"Very well," said Percy, "I am not the one to object," so then they all agreed to meet again next night, and that it should be double or quits.

Hitherto they had dined together first, but this next night they were not to dine together; so Percy went to the New Theatre first, and fell deeper in love than before with Lucia Lavington. Once or twice it struck him, that she looked in his direction, and that then her glance was particularly soft and tender, his heart beat faster,

and he began to wish to make her acquaintance; and yet it was an absurd term to use with regard to Miss Lavington, for he felt as if they were friends already, quite old friends, and understood each other perfectly. Lord Lansdon took possession of him, and carried him behind the scenes after "Noblesse oblige" was over, and introduced Percy to that awful personage, the manager, and Percy could not then refrain from speaking of Miss Lucia Lavington, and asking where she had made her *dêbut.*

"She made her *dêbut* in this theatre," said the manager, "taking, of course, quite one of the minor parts at first, but I soon promoted her, for I saw she had the real thing in her, and her beauty alone would enable her to make a sensation as a heroine, whilst in an inferior part it was rather a disadvantage, robbing the other ladies, who should have been more prominent, of whatever interest they would otherwise have possessed in the eyes of the public."

"But how did you hear of her? Surely she is a lady, is she not?"

"Undoubtedly. No one who knew Miss Lavington in the least would hesitate about answering that question. How she came to be an actress is quite another matter, which I cannot explain, though I know very well how I came to engage her.

"And how was that?" asked Percy. He seemed to have a very insatiable curiosity that evening.

"She came to me asking for employment, with an introduction from some theatrical friends, professionals, who said they could not answer for her powers, but would feel much obliged by my engaging her, if I found I could do so. Well, she was very quiet, and rather stiff in her manner, and would, I thought, make the veriest stick imaginable; but I rather wanted to oblige her friends, so, though I thought it would never answer, I went on talking to her, trying to see what part she could possibly take. Like

a goose, the young lady kept her veil down, and a very thick veil too, so, as politely as I could, I requested her to raise it, pleading that I could not possibly engage an actress without seeing her. She appeared affronted, but threw back her veil, and rather threw me into astonishment, that she should thus have kept back the best possible letter of introduction she could have had. Her manner changed then too, from being simply stiff, she took upon herself the prettiest assumption of dignity, and at the same time pleaded her great anxiety to act in the most pathetic tones. I saw she had a pretty, indeed lovely face, and I thought she might take in a boy's part, perhaps even from the very badness of her acting, for the public like a girl, when she takes a boy's part, to look as much like a girl still as possible. But when I suggested to her the idea, she rose up to leave me, as if—oh, much in the same way she leaves Lawrence Grey in the artist's studio, as you

have just seen her do, only saying in the most dignified tone: 'Rather starvation.' But though she spoke decidedly enough, she looked as if her heart was broken. I shall never forget her look then, it was first class simply (speaking professionally), but it made me feel quite queer at the time, so that I did not recover myself till just as she got to the door; then I called out happily just in time: 'Stop a moment. See if you can do that over again.' 'Do what?' she said as cold as ice; but she understood in a moment or two, came back and placed herself in the same position she had been in before, thought for a moment or two, then got up and repeated the attitude, tone and expression to the very life. After that I knew she would do. She went into a dead faint the next moment, but when she recovered, I told her she was all right, she must only wait till I had a vacancy for her, and then she should take a principal part; meanwhile, if she liked to take some lesser

rôles, I should be happy to engage her at once. She consented immediately, only stipulating for a choice as to what parts she would take; but though she made this stipulation, I must say she has not given me a tenth part of the trouble ordinary actresses give, and is without exception the most obliging and most easily pleased, I have ever come across."

"How I should like to know her," said Percy, across whose face a hundred changes of expression had flitted since the beginning of this story.

"Well, come down and dine with me next Tuesday, at Twickenham; she has promised to come down then, though it is harder to get her to a dinner party than to anything else. You must excuse me now, for I see it is getting late," and the manager hurried away.

When Miss Lucia Lavington's engagement with him was up, he did not expect that it would ever be renewed, and he wanted to do

what he could to get her a good husband, as she was pretty sure to have one, in one way or another; besides, if Mr. Gordon did not do for her, it might not be amiss through her to make this rich handsome young widower acquainted with the manager's own daughters, so in giving the invitation to Twickenham, there were two strings to the manager's bow. Percy Gordon looked at his watch as the manager left him, and saw it was later than he thought; Lord Lansdon seemed to have already gone away, so he went out alone, treading upon air as he went, and intending to enjoy a cigar in a leisurely manner, whilst making his way to the Club, where he was to have his revenge; but at the door of the theatre he was stopped by a woman cloaked and veiled, who seemed to be endeavouring to say something to him, but to be too much agitated to articulate anything. She laid her hand upon his arm, and led him a few steps thus, but as they got into the full light of a lamp, he recovered

from his astonishment, and shaking off her trembling hold, turned round and looked her full in the face. What was his astonishment, and horror at recognising Mrs. Northwey!

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "what has brought you here?"

"I came to see you—I have been waiting such a long time. I thought you were certain to come out at the end of 'Noblesse oblige,' but you did not come, so I waited," she gasped out with a strange catching of her breath between each sentence.

"But what did you want to see me for—and now so particularly?" and the golden visions he had begun to form about that dinner at Twickenham receded further into cloudland, and Percy realised what an incumbrance Mrs. Northwey would be, and no longer felt magnanimous about charging himself with her.

"To stop you going to play—I know you are going to play—I have promised to

do what I can to save you—I have promised to warn you," she gasped out in the same strange disjointed fashion as before, "and I said what I could the other night, and you paid no attention, and I cannot bear it any longer, I must go to-morrow—so there is only to-night for me to keep my promise in."

"But whom did you promise? What do you mean? I don't understand you. Here, get into this cab, or somebody may see us talking together," and, hailing a cab, Percy helped Mrs. Northwey into it, gave some vague order to the cabman, and sprang in after her. "Now what do you mean? And first, what did you mean by not meeting me the other morning?" The dinner at Twickenham, and Lucia Lavington's beautiful pale face must both have vanished from his recollection by this time.

"I told you I could not. Oh, it was her wraith, it could not be herself in reality, it must have been her wraith that stopped

me. Listen, and I will tell you how it was," cried Mrs. Northwey, clasping her hands and sobbing almost hysterically.

Percy tried to soothe her, but his soothing seemed almost to make her worse, so after a few minutes he desisted, sitting by her in silence, staring out into the night, and wondering what would be the end of all this.

At last she recovered herself as by an effort. "I went out to do some shopping in Oxford Street that morning, I drove there, and then when I had done my shopping I thought I would walk to meet you, so that nobody might know anything about it, and I came to that dreadful crossing by the Marble Arch. You know how nervous I am about crossings, and I was nearly run over, but I got across all right in the end, and then just as I had got safe, a lady spoke to me, at least I thought it was a lady then, but now I think it was a ghost, and she said: 'Mrs. Northwey, you are going to meet Percy Gordon. Recollect

you swore you would never go away with him.' I was very much startled, but I said: 'No, I did not. Who did I swear it to?' and then she threw back her veil, and I saw it was Florence Berkeley, only deadly pale, more like her ghost than herself. 'You swore it to me,' she said quite low, and in such a hollow tone it sounded like some one speaking from the grave. 'Recollect,' she said, and I trembled all over, and had to lean against the railing to support myself. 'If he does not go away with me, he will be ruined by Captain Northwey,' I said, and I laughed. I don't know why I laughed, it makes me shudder now only to think of it, and I don't know why I am telling you, but—she only said: 'If you are free from your oath, I am free from mine.' 'Oh, you are dead,' I said, 'I have never heard of you for years, and I see you are dead.' 'Then I shall come back from the dead to marry him,' she said in the same awful tone, 'but it will

not be necessary. Go home now, and be thankful I have saved you from a worse sin, than any you have yet committed. Leave Captain Northwey, for you can never be his true wife, whilst he is what he is ; go to your old home, they will surely help you there, and promise me as a sign of penitence, that you will try to save Percy Gordon from being ruined, and then never speak to him again.' 'I promise,' I said, and then, when I looked up, she was gone. I cannot understand it yet, she cannot have jumped into a cab, for none stopped, and it was only a moment, and she was out of sight all round, wherever I looked. It must have been her ghost come back to prevent me breaking my oath, for I swore to her at Ryde that I would never go away with you."

"Did you ?" said Percy. He was greatly startled, and he did not know what part of this story surprised him most. He could not make any remark as yet, for he was

not collected enough to speak, only he hoped it was not Florence's ghost, for then Florence herself must be dead, and how he had loved her when he was a boy! "Now," continued Mrs. Northwey, "I am going home to-morrow. I dare not tell Captain Northwey, but I am going just the same, and this is the last time I shall ever see you. Promise me you won't play any more with my husband, he means to ruin you, and he is sure to succeed."

"I must go to-night, I am engaged. It is to be double or quits, and I should be dishonourable if I failed in my engagement. It is late already, and I must make haste. I will not forget your warning, but you have exaggerated ideas of Captain Northwey's skill; I believe myself his equal, though the luck has been against me lately."

"And you must go to-night? Well, I have done my best," and Mrs. Northwey sobbed no more, but her voice sounded

despairing. "It seems I can do harm, but not any good—not any good," she repeated.

"Yes, you can," said Percy, always eager to pour balm into the sorrow that was so near at hand, he could not fail to see it, and equally ready to forget it, as soon as circumstances removed it to a little distance from himself. "I shall always remember what you have said to-night, and if I am never to see you again, I shall often think of you, and hope some day to hear good tidings of you."

"You will never hear good tidings of me," said Mrs. Northwey, in a low voice, but Percy did not hear her.

"Shall I tell the man to drive you home now?" he asked.

"No, no! Then they might hear I had been with you. Put me down now, and I will walk a little, and then find another cab. No, you must not come with me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," and for the first time Percy Gordon held her in his arms, and kissed her, and Mrs. Northwey let him do it, for she knew all was over between them, and so what did it matter now? What did anything matter! it seemed to her then? Poor, ill-used, foolish, heart-broken little woman! Then she sprang out of the cab, and hurried away through the flaring, flickering gaslight, and Percy Gordon watched her for a moment or two, and then drove to Captain Northwey's Club, and played till morning, and when they rose up from the card-table —as the intrusive daylight began to force its way in, Percy Gordon was the winner, and had won back far more than he had lost before.

Of course he could not refuse then, to meet and play again.

CHAPTER VI.

"IN HIS HEART IS A BLIND DESIRE."

It was Tuesday evening, and Percy and Lord Lansdon drove down together to dine with the manager of the New Theatre at his villa at Twickenham. The dinner was for eight o'clock, and the two friends were rather late, so that when Percy entered the drawing-room, a north room, with heavy curtains and deep set windows, he found it rather difficult to distinguish the other guests already all assembled there. The manager came forward to greet him, and presented him to his wife, a stately dark woman, who promised to be something of a manager too, in her own line, and was said

to tyrannise over Mr. Garrick far more than that kindly dictator ever tyrannised over his Company, and then he told Percy he was to take Miss Lavington in to dinner, and led him away to be introduced to her. Percy felt his heart beat faster, though in the twilight, having just come in from the light outside, he would never have known the lady leaning back in a low arm chair, surrounded by a conglomeration of black silk and net, for the pale, beautiful actress, the angel that had haunted his dreams of late. He tried, in spite of his agitation, to bear himself in his best manner, while going through the form of presentation, and it seemed to him that, as he came up to her, the lady before him started. Could it be possible that he had not been mistaken, that those glances had been meant for him, and that she had now recognised him as one of her most constant admirers at the New Theatre! Buoyed up by this hope, he ventured to say :

"This introduction seems more of a form even than usual. We have so often met before, that I feel as if we were old friends."

"Yes, old friends—long ago," she said confusedly.

"Not so very long ago," he replied, and then he had to take her in to dinner, and as he did so, he ventured to press slightly the hand that rested upon his arm, and the actress did not seem to resent the pressure. "She is just like other women," thought Percy sadly, but he was very much in love, and he could not cease to be in love upon the instant, because she did not repel his advances, but received them much as other women. So he called to mind all that Lord Lansdon had been saying on the way down, about her "*froideur*" and her "*hauteur*" (for his lordship dealt largely in French words, though rarely in French phrases,) and how he did not understand a girl, who always spoke to a man as if she did not think him fit to speak to, and Percy con-

cluded that by some wonderful piece of good fortune he was the favoured one, and that she knew him from his constant attendance at the New Theatre, and was quite different with other men.

"You do not know what pleasure you have afforded me of late," said he, as he deposited her at the dinner-table.

"Oh, in 'Noblesse oblige,' you mean," and at once her manner was so cold that Percy felt frozen, and did not dare to look at her, though he longed to see what she was like in ordinary evening dress. He felt he had tried a wrong topic, so he sought about for another, for apparently she did not care to talk about her profession. But while he was thinking of some other subject, she herself went on with the one on which he had begun. "Do you go much to the theatre?" she asked.

"Very often to the New Theatre," he replied.

Again she was silent for a few moments.

He began now to think it must be compliments that were distasteful to her, of course she was deluged with them, so he went on himself, "If there was better acting at the others, or even if there were better pieces, I might care to go to them, but the pieces are mostly written to suit the mob, and whether it is my fault or theirs, they generally succeed in disgusting me."

"Do you think they are written to suit the mob? I always fancy the mob, as you call it, would prefer something higher, if something higher was only to be had, and that the pieces of the day are written to suit the degraded taste of those which are called the upper classes, and which are daily becoming more and more leavened by the vulgarity of people, who only a short time ago were in the middle class."

"It is the fashion, I believe, owing to Kingsley and a few more, to extol the taste and feeling of the masses. As far as I know them, they only differ from the middle

classes in being yet coarser with just the same low tastes."

"Perhaps you have not studied them much."

"No, I acknowledge I have not, but if you were to go—which, of course, though would be impossible for you—into one of the Penny Gaffs, which surely are intended for quite the lowest classes, you would soon find what jokes took best."

"What jokes! yes. But as it happens I have been to a Penny Gaff. I do not mind telling *you*," and Miss Lavington's smile, though melancholy, was very sweet, as she laid this stress upon the "you." "Instead of at a cheap concert, it was originally intended that Blanche Beaumarchais should begin trying to earn her livelihood at a Penny Gaff, and I objected, and had it altered, because of these very jokes, without which the representation could not possibly be made life-like; but if you go beyond this, it is the noble sentiments that

the people applaud with phrensy—those are what they really care for. What you I dare say might call a platitude, they would admire, and do you not often in the better kind of theatres hear the galleries clapping heroic declarations, which those who call themselves their betters deride as bosh ?"

"You are a champion of the lower orders, I see. But of the lower orders as they are in London ?"

"They are much cleverer here than in the country ; but I do not constitute myself their champion, either here or anywhere else. I like the poor, because it is so much easier to be of use to them than to the rich, and one always likes best the people one can be of use to."

"Or the people that can be of use to one," said Percy, with a smile.

"I have never found them yet," said Miss Lavington, with that same strange, sweet, melancholy smile.

Percy looked at her now ; she was very

pale, and seemed somewhat agitated, and he wondered more than ever what her history had been. Seeing her well-shaped, small white hands, her dignified bearing, and the high-bred setting of her head upon the small firm throat, observing also how well she looked in full dress, that most trying costume to any woman not a lady born, he could not doubt but that her birth was good, how then had she become an actress?

"I wonder that with your views you took to acting in a theatre so much given up to the West End, instead of in one of the more generally popular ones," he said, after a few moments' thought.

"A popular theatre would hardly have paid so well, and of course it was only money that ever could have induced me to become an actress—that is to say the want of money." She sighed as she spoke, and Percy was inexpressibly touched.

This beautiful creature who had already won herself such a reputation, and who was

so cold and impassible with other men—he fully believed it now, since he had himself been treated to a specimen of this manner of hers—seemed willing to take him into her confidence. He was flattered by this proof of her good opinion, but he was yet more touched, and he longed to give her the benefit of his advice and sympathy.

"The want of money is certainly the most powerful motive that there is, but it was a daring step it urged you to. I hope you have never had cause to regret it."

"To regret it! I hardly know if that is the word. I feel as if I had had no choice, but it was very dreadful to me, and it is very dreadful to me now. I cannot bear that anyone I have known before should know me now, for I know what the world thinks of actresses, and how it speaks of them."

"Oh no, no," exclaimed Percy, carried quite out of himself by the calm almost despairing tones in which the beautiful idol

of his dreams spoke these last words. "At least no one speaks of you as of an ordinary actress. You have won to yourself such a name already that no one would dare. I have heard men talk of you of course; indeed, everyone is talking of nothing else, but they feel you are a lady, and they speak of you as such. I would not stand it, if it were otherwise. But I understand what you mean by not wishing to see your old friends. That has led you to assume a false name, has it not?" He added this lower, throwing it out as a feeler, for he could not believe she was really Miss Lavington, and yet wanted to make sure that she was not. He thought too, it was just possible in this way he might find out who she really was, she seemed to be very open. But he was disappointed; Miss Lavington did not seem quite to understand his question as he had meant it, she replied :—

"Not that so much as the wish that

no one should blush for being my relation."

"If it was only that, I wonder you should care to keep up your *incognito* any longer."

"Oh, but I do care; I do. Pray do not betray me. Though you might not be ashamed of me, I know others would, and I could not bear it to be known."

If Percy had not been altogether devoted to Miss Lavington before, he would have been fairly taken by storm now. "How charmingly natural she is!" he thought. "None of the regular English stiffness about her! She treats me at once as if I were the old friend I should like to be."

But after that they did not have much more conversation together; only when the ladies left the dining-room Percy found himself the object of not a little envy and jealousy among the men, for no one had ever seen the beautiful impassive actress talk as she had talked but now. "With her heart on her lips," as Bertram Beres-

ford thought enviously, for he also had managed an introduction, and was now dining at Twickenham for the second time to meet Miss Lavington, but neither time had he met with any such favour from her as that with which Percy Gordon had now been treated. She was cold as ice, as everyone agreed, and even sadder in her own character, than as Blanche Beaumarchais in the Play; but now here had she been talking to Percy Gordon the first time of making his acquaintance, as if he were an old and intimate friend, only that she showed more agitation about doing so, than people usually discover in talking to such friends at a casual meeting at a dinner-party. In brief she had talked to him this first time of seeing him, as if she already knew and cared for him.

Her other admirers were desperately jealous, but that did not prevent them from clustering round her just as usual after dinner, and Percy Gordon seeing her at

once so surrounded, that there was no chance of a *tête-à-tête*, thought it best not to follow up his triumph, but watched her from a distance, smiling his captivating sorrowful smile, whenever, as once or twice happened, he managed to catch her eye. Meantime Lord Mincington made the most of his opportunities, and loaded her with flattery, which Miss Lavington listened to with a face immoveable but for a lip that curled slightly every now and then. Once or twice she even tried to draw out Bertram Beresford as a defence against the fast and furious assault that the young earl was carrying on against her. But Bertram Beresford was very difficult to draw out that evening, and seemed to have very little to say for himself. Conversable though he generally was, he was too nervous to speak much now, when the beautiful Lucia actually condescended to talk to him, and tried to draw him out, but he could not be drawn out that evening; his ner-

vousness led him first to burst forth with something very enthusiastic, and then to shrink back into his shell again, abashed at his own vehemence.

Miss Lavington saw that he alone was frightened of her, and was kinder in her manner to him, than to the other men. "I wonder taking so much interest in politics that you are not in the House," she said to him, quietly disregarding her other admirers, who were all so ready to talk to her, and quite untroubled by nervous fears.

"I hope to be there this next election; but all my father's family have always been in the Guards, so of course I had to go into them also, and I do not know if I shall ever win his consent to my selling out, though I hope to do so," he added with a smile. She had succeeded in putting him more at his ease, now that she had begun to talk about his hobby.

"I hope you will too. Though I do not agree with all your views, I would rather

see you entrusted with the carrying them out than most men. For you talk of all the questions of the day, as they concern the human race, not only as they may affect the small body of men, who form a ministry; and indeed I think I should prefer to know your views were to be carried out by men like you, than that even those opinions I more agree with were to win the day, entrusted to such men as are now uppermost," said she; and as she spoke she smiled that still, quiet smile, that seemed only to flit across her face in order to remind her worshippers how entirely she was a being of another sphere, sent but to gladden this world for a little while, and finding it a far sadder world that that from which she came, and for which she still entertained many home-sick longings, *saudades*, as the Portuguese beautifully name them.

Then she talked on to him, telling him what her views were and hearing his arguments against them, but not arguing her-

self. That she did not attempt, for as she said very early in the conversation, she had been unable really to study any of the subjects of which they talked, and feared that she had in great measure formed her opinions from her feelings in woman wise, but she listened now to his arguments with great interest, and Bertram Beresford was in the seventh heaven, and Lord Mincington swore inwardly that she was a "devil of a coquette," and sought hard for an opportunity for an offer, but found it not, though he felt none the less sure that any offer from him must be accepted if it only could be made.

Percy Gordon began to feel uneasy that he might be making a mistake, and giving the other men too much time; but when he said good-night to Miss Lavington, advancing forward to do so just at the last moment, as she was leaving the room attended on by the manager himself, and with all the other men hanging near in hopes of

getting a parting glance, he decided he had made no mistake, for as he pressed the actress's hand with a tender lingering pressure, and said to her: "This is not to be the last time we shall meet, I hope. I may see you again, may I not, Miss Lavington?" she replied at once—

"Yes; if you care to come to the out-of-the-way part where I live."

"Where is it?" he exclaimed enraptured, straightway producing pocket-book and pencil to write down the address.

She took them from him, and wrote it herself, saying—

"If you care to come and see me, come about five, but not later." Then she walked from the room, leaving him in a bewilderment of joy.

"Did she really say you might go and see her?" asked the now again envious Bertie, who had overheard, much to his own sorrow, and went home to wonder, why it was a fellow like Gordon always got on so well

with women, and to bemoan his own hard fate in being born plain. Poor Bertram Beresford, he was as gallant a young fellow as ever stepped, and a "*w*eally good fellow too," as Beauregard often pronounced him to Linda, Bertie's adoring sister; but neither he himself, nor anyone else, unless possibly Linda, thought him calculated to win lady's love; and hitherto he had not troubled his head much about this, nor thought twice of any woman, but now he smoked a cigar or two in a meditative manner before going to bed, pondering on the nature of women, and wondering why a fellow like Gordon was sure to get on with them in preference to many a better man. By which better man Bertram Beresford did not mean himself, but one or two of the fellows he knew, for certainly conceit was not to be reckoned among his faults, though he did look forward to regenerating the world, if he could but once get his father's consent to his leaving the Guards, and standing for the

county at the next general election, already pretty well fixed for the autumn.

"Was she very charming last night, Bertie?" asked his devoted sister next morning. She always piqued herself on making Bertram's breakfast for him, no easy matter, considering the late hours she had usually kept the night before, and that Bertram, wonderful exception amongst guardsmen, had a fancy for punctual nine o'clock breakfast, often calculating how many years of time he added to his life in this way.

"Oh yes, very charming," he said, in an indifferent sort of tone that disappointed Linda.

"I expected you to come back rapturous," she exclaimed. "I lay awake ever so long last night thinking of it. You know, Bertie, I never could imagine how you were to find a wife nice enough for you in this horrid prosaic nineteenth century, and now I have quite settled it is to be this beautiful actress,

who must, I am sure, be quite enough out of the common even to satisfy me."

"Hush, hush, my dear Linda, you must not talk of her in this way. Recollect she is a lady, and probably would never think of me," said Bertram, trying to look philosophical about it. "But how did you enjoy your ball last night? was it very crowded?"

"Oh yes, but it was *perfectly* charming."

"*Perfectly* charming! perhaps it was that kept you awake a little? You silly child, I am not going to tease you; you know I never do, so you need not run away in that ridiculous fashion."

"No, I know you are the dearest and best of brothers, and the noblest of men—except one," said Linda, now coming back and throwing her arms round him. "Only I wish you would not have your mouth so full of buttered toast, for I hate it, and I want you to kiss me, Bertie dear, for I am so happy. There now I have told you first, and I always said I should, though mamma

declared it would not be proper—but then I never do what is proper, except in loving you, you old darling—and Philip," she added softly.

"So you have accepted Beauregard after all, have you? But don't kneel beside me in that ridiculous manner, or are you waiting for my blessing? I am sure I hope you will be very happy."

"As if there could be any doubt about it!" cried Linda, rising indignant. "Oh Bertie, you know you like Philip."

"Yes, Phil is a very good fellow at bottom, but I don't know that he is altogether worthy of my little sister, foolish though she is, or that he will be quite so careful of her as I have been. And now, may I request of you to eat some breakfast, if only to show that you have a mind great enough not to be troubled with such trivial matters, as this about which you have been talking to me. As I have been expecting it daily for the last month, you can not ex-

pect me to put on an appearance of great surprise at the announcement you have just made me, only for your benefit too."

"Oh, anything to please you, sir. Perhaps if you don't require all that roll, as well as that immense plate of buttered toast before you, you will be so polite as to offer it to me. But now, Bertie dear, do be serious a little—are not the tables turned when I ask such a thing of you? But tell me, Bertie, do you think I shall ever make Philip a good wife? I am so anxious about it. Do say you think so, for if you don't I don't know what I can do, for I must marry him now, as I have promised."

"Poor dear," said Bertram, "it is very dreadful for you to be bound by such a promise, is it not? Lucky for Philip, though. If you only make half so good a wife as you have made sister, he may think himself a much more fortunate fellow than he deserves to be, though he is a real good fellow at bottom, as you know I think him,

or I should have taken pretty good care that you never came to me with any such story as that you have been telling me this morning."

Then Linda grew all smiles again, and a kind of friendly sparring ensued between them, such as often takes place between brothers and sisters who are on particularly good terms with each other.

CHAPTER VII.

"HER HEART IS SICK WITH THINKING."

THE reader has probably long ere this seen through the thin veil of mystery thrown over Lucia Lavington, and detected Florence Berkeley underneath. Naturally she treated Percy Gordon with a degree of friendliness that was surprising to the other men, accustomed to see her almost defiant in her manner towards strangers; this manner having grown upon her of late from her feeling herself in a false position towards them. It was not strange that Percy did not recognize her, for he had never really seen her at Ryde, and if she was changed now from what she had been then,

she was still more changed from the pretty country girl to whom he had plighted his troth long years ago, at St. James's Cray. Besides, before Percy ever made her acquaintance, he had learnt to know, and know well, her face, gestures, and voice, as those of Lucia Lavington, the new star in the theatrical world. He had seen the likeness in her to Florence Berkeley of old days, his young love, seen it, and forgotten it ; it was not likely ever again to strike him now. He was vain also, and not unaccustomed to make conquests at first sight, so that it did not surprise him much that she should treat him with such distinguished marks of her favour. They did not lead him as they would have led many another man to begin seeking about at once for some explanation of them. He concluded that she had observed him at the New Theatre, and that after all in some respects at least she was but like other women, easily captivated by a pleasing manner and

graceful exterior, especially when accompanied by feelings of love and admiration for herself; such feelings as Percy knew all too well he entertained for her, nor had been at any pains to conceal.

On the other hand, it never for a moment occurred to Florence, who had recognised Percy at the first glance, that he could possibly not recognise her, though his manner surprised her not a little, once or twice. She might have been yet more surprised, had she not herself felt so much embarrassed at meeting him. The old embarrassment, she had felt at Ryde, had only in part passed away, for though she had then torn from her bleeding heart the love she had once given him, yet she knew that he had never loved his wife, and that now, poor, beautiful Evelyn being dead, he was free once again to return to his old love, if so minded, and his manner seemed rather to imply that he was so minded, and all this brought to life again the perhaps never very thoroughly

extinguished embers of her own old feeling for him.

Besides, she would have felt embarrassed at meeting any relation or old friend in the acknowledged position of an actress, for Florence was proud, and it had been a bitter struggle before she had brought herself to take this lowering step, for, as a lady, she could not but feel it such. Over and above all this, what most embarrassed her on the occasion of this first meeting, after so many years, with Percy Gordon, was her ignorance as to how far he might be informed about the part she had played with regard to himself and Mrs. Northwey.

She had overheard the place and time of meeting next day named by Percy, as he handed Mrs. Northwey into a carriage on coming out from the Theatre, and had determined on stopping it at all hazards. Fortune had befriended her, and she had met Mrs. Northwey by an accident, before she reached the appointed place ; she had

seen at once how over-wrought and frightened the poor, foolish woman was, and a little of the manner she had learnt upon the stage had assisted her in overawing the poor weak creature, and binding her more firmly than ever. As to her subsequent disappearance, she was dressed in slight mourning, and among the everchanging crowd about the Marble Arch, it was easy for one so inconspicuously clad, to be lost sight of quickly. Mrs. Northwey was hardly herself, and searching about with wandering, uncertain eyes, it was no wonder that to her the disappearance should seem marvellous, and should thus confirm her in the belief that the deadly pale features, revealed to her but for an instant, were those of Florence Berkeley's ghost.

How much of this Percy might know Florence was ignorant of, and whilst this recollection made her feel nervous, it also made her stiffer and colder in her manner towards him, than she would otherwise

have been. She knew nothing of Percy's constant attendance at the New Theatre, having only recognised him the last night he went there with Mrs. Northwey, when the two once familiar faces together caught her eye. She observed them from the side scenes, and saw enough in their manner to each other to alarm her. It was not quite by accident that she happened to be standing by when Percy handed Mrs. Northwey into the carriage, but it was as much for Mrs. Northwey's sake now as for Percy's, that she determined to do what she could towards stopping the meeting next day. The recollection of the terrified little woman who had married the man she fancied she loved, and found it answer so badly, had never quite passed away from her during all her troubles. For Florence had had many troubles, very many, before she became an actress, and before she won for herself a reputation, if not celebrity.

When she came to London in the original

instance with Mrs. Cholmondeley, she was, as the reader will remember, greatly impoverished. Sixty pounds a year, even if she had had quite that, is hardly an income for a young lady to set up independent housekeeping on, and with that she had just lent seventy pounds to Major Bolton. Those seventy pounds he had fully intended to repay her on the first possible opportunity, but from the tone of Fanny's first letter from Mauritius, Florence saw at once how difficult it would be to find that opportunity, and always over generous she begged immediately that he would consider it to be a loan, only to be repaid when he was in easy circumstances again. She did not ask him to consider it a gift, because she knew Major Bolton to be proud as well as herself, and that were she to do so he would probably pinch himself to the uttermost to discharge his debt immediately, and from Fanny's account, not a little pinching did they seem to have to go through as

it was. But through them, though without their knowledge, for it had never occurred to them that the eight hundred pounds could have come from any one but Lord Bulmer, Florence had a great deal more than her fair share of pinching. The Welsh friends were unable to receive her when they had intended, owing to the sudden illness of one of their party, which took them abroad, and Florence stayed on in Town with Mrs. Cholmondeley, not as a guest, for Mrs. Cholmondeley was not rich enough for that, but simply living on in the same lodgings, and sharing with her the same scanty meals which both paid for as equally as they could. Then would Florence have entered almost at once on the already overstocked market for governesses, but that she knew that whatever that market might be for others, its doors were closed for her. What mother, whose daughters she could possibly undertake to teach, would take her without a recom-

mendation, and to whom could she apply for a recommendation? Mrs. Cholmondeley would do anything she could for her, and Florence had promised to ask her help when she needed any, but Mrs. Cholmondeley, though she was a Cholmondeley now, and on good terms with all the other Cholmondeleys, would be no use as a recommendation for any one else. Cyril Thornton had promised to do anything he could for her, and she had said she would never be able to bring herself to ask anything of him, but she could have brought herself now to ask this service of him, as her old rector, the clergyman whose parish she had lived in as a child; only, alas! he was no longer such. He was a priest of the Church of Rome now, and had finally cut himself off from all his relations, who had never held very closely to him, and from all his former friends who had held very closely to him indeed, at least some few of them, and only separated themselves at last with

a struggle, when he had willed, and willed desperately, that it should be so.

The Bulmers, with whom she had been living of late, she could ask of nothing now. The people with whom she ought to have been mixing up to the last at Ryde as an equal, or more than an equal, had held themselves aloof from her; and those of them who had been daring enough, had even gone the length of cutting her. Far from being ready to speak good words of her, they would all be but too ready to speak evil of her. No, for her Florence knew that there was no going out as a governess; and the doors of that market being closed to her, that natural first resource of those unfortunates, "ladies in reduced circumstances," being taken away from her, she thought no more of adding to her income, but resigned herself meekly to her poverty.

London is not a very dear place to live in for very poor people, who can only afford the necessaries of life, but perhaps nowhere

else is the giving up the luxuries of life so galling as there. Florence was not a spoilt child of luxury, but she had lived in a comfortable English home, and travelled abroad surrounded by many English comforts, and never known what it was to want for money. Perhaps had she known a little more of it earlier, there might have been more for her at her father's death, but Colonel Berkeley had never troubled himself about his daughters' future. They would have to marry rich men, he knew, in order to live on in at all the same style he had kept up, but with their pretty faces they would be fools, he thought, if they could not. So now Florence was reduced to that pitiful state, when there is absolutely no money for those expenses that most housekeepers put down as sundries, and that go so far towards making life comfortable; she was indeed reduced to that state, when even the washing bill is a consideration. Perhaps that is the most galling part of her poverty to a young girl

who has been brought up as a lady, in London especially, where cleanliness is always difficult of attainment, even with washing bills *ad libitum*.

Florence had been accustomed to go about so much alone during her father's long illness abroad, where it is less the custom than in England, and she knew so few people in London, that she minded, perhaps less than most girls would have minded it, having always to walk to go anywhere she wanted, and always to walk alone, for Mrs. Cholmondeley soon again became too much of an invalid to go about.

The rich Cholmondeleys were more or less kind to their invalid poor relation, and sent her little luxuries out of their abundance, and gradually as Florence grew paler, and seemed to need them almost equally, and Mrs. Cholmondeley pressed them upon her more and more, it dawned upon Florence that if left to herself Mrs. Cholmondeley would fare better than if she continued

to share expenses with her, and that for her sake Mrs. Cholmondeley had refused many invitations from these rich relations of hers, the accepting which might have been good for her. It was no use for her to say to Magdalene, that she would go and live by herself; Florence knew the warm hearted impulsive woman would never hear of anything of the kind, so she pleaded her old wish to go into a sisterhood, and made that a pretext for separating herself from her. But Florence was not strong enough then, even to be taken upon trial as a sister, so she went as a visitor to do what work she could, knowing it could only be for a short time, for her slender means would not hold out long. Then, when she was left alone, Mrs. Cholmondeley went to stay with some of her husband's grand relations far away in the North; and when she had gone, Florence did not stay much longer in the sisterhood. Perhaps she was unfortunate in her choice, anyhow its advanced ritualism disgusted

her, who was specially prejudiced against it, from the old doubts which she had felt once and overcome, for it seemed to her that those doubts had been about a real thing, and that ritualism was but the shadow of that real thing, of whose falsity she had doubted, and then ceased to doubt, having become quite convinced of it. She felt also that she was over-taxing her strength without doing much good, besides living beyond her means; so she left the sisterhood again, and took a room in the house of a poor widow, with whom she had become acquainted whilst living in the sisterhood. What specially recommended this place of abode to her was, that it would be impossible for Mrs. Cholmondeley on her return to town to take a room in the same house; but this precaution seemed to be unnecessary, for Mrs. Cholmondeley had fallen ill again, and months passed without her regaining sufficient strength to undertake the journey south.

Then Florence had a very hard time of it. She was without friends, and London air without London luxuries certainly did not suit her, she failed visibly from day to day, and her only comfort was in Fanny's letters. These letters were very affectionate, and very full of praises of her husband, but they were always grieving over that one dreary want, the want of money, as the dark side of the picture.

Florence made little efforts in a sort of hopeless way to gain money; she went almost without necessaries for a few days to save up enough money with which to buy painting materials; and then she tried to recall her old skill, and did a little sketch of Fanny's head from memory. It was a good selling subject, and she sold it, but it barely repaid her for the necessary materials; still this gave her an object to work for, and she painted several more little pictures, but not well. She knew they were not well done herself, they were only done for money,

and by degrees she got so many left upon her hands, that she began to despair, and gave up painting. Then she thought she would try writing—that, at all events, did not require so large an outlay, and she tried a very humble line, and succeeded moderately. All this time, while cut off from friends of her own station, she had been mixing with the poor; she had no money to give them, but she gave them sympathy, and not seldom help. Many a poor woman did she help to make or mend clothes for an ever-increasing family, many a child did she see through some one or other of the many infantile disorders, and, most disagreeable task of all, many a house had she put to rights and tidied, when the poor mother was down with some illness that made her unfit for such work.

"She schooled herself to sights and sounds uncouth,
That with the poor and stricken she might make
A home."—

Doing all this, she had gained a knowledge

of the ways of thought and living among the poor, such as it is almost, if not quite, impossible for a lady living as a lady to acquire, and Florence made use of this knowledge now, and wrote stories for the poor about the poor. If the poor had been the publishers, they would have paid her well, for these stories came home to them, and there was a large demand for them, when once they were published; but, unfortunately for her, the publishers were well-to-do men, who saw no particular merit in her stories, and they paid her very little. Still it was something, if she could only have worked on steadily at it, but she could not. Her imagination had never been very lively, and now, ill and crushed by poverty, she found it each day harder to think of a subject for a new story. Then at last she grew too ill to go about amongst the poor any longer, and after that she broke down altogether. Fortunately then Mrs. Cholmondeley came back from the North, and, find-

ing Florence in this state, she took a tiny cottage in the outskirts of London, and insisted on her coming to share it with her.

Florence was in no condition to oppose anything now, and soon the fresh air and her friend's loving kindness worked like magic upon her, but during that illness she had altered much, and when she recovered she looked taller, and her beauty was already beginning to belong to that different order, which ultimately it settled down into, and won so much admiration for her as Blanche Beaumarchais. It was then that Augustus Stevens first fell in love with Florence Berkeley. He had always been fond of his sister Magdalene, though her grand marriage had greatly cut her off from the rest of her family, but now that her husband was dead, and that she had taken this little cottage quite in the country, as he, cockney that he was, considered it, he often ran down to see her, and soon oftener than before to see the pale beautiful girl, who

was living with her. During all that time he never betrayed his love, for though he found her in a measure dependent on his own sister's bounty, he saw at once that she was far above him, and he was too much of a gentleman at heart to take advantage of her necessities; but one day he said to his sister: "What a pity it seems that your friend should be a lady! She is so poor, and she might make a fortune any day if she could only go upon the stage, but now of course that is out of the question for her." When he said this to his sister she only replied at the time: "Oh yes, she could never become an actress," and seemed to put the idea entirely away from her, as one that could not be entertained for a moment, but nevertheless it did not pass away from her mind, and after a day or two she mentioned it to Florence.

Florence did not say anything at first; she was very full of thought that day, for she had just received the letter from Major Bolton,

in which he announced the birth of his first child, and said, that though his debts had seemed nothing to him once, they crushed him utterly, now that he was a husband and a father.

"What does your brother mean by a fortune?" she asked at last.

"I'm sure I don't know what he means exactly, but you know great fortunes are made upon the stage sometimes."

"I thought that was only at the opera," said Florence, and there the subject dropped.

But next time Augustus Stevens came down to the little cottage, Florence asked him what made him think she would be successful as an actress, and he replied very gravely and slowly, not at all as if he were paying her a compliment, but as if he were trying to state the truth to the best of his ability: "Every action of yours has a peculiar grace in it, such as it is pleasant to watch, and you have great command over

the muscles of your face, for I have observed you always look interested, when you choose, and never bored though you often must be; besides, you have a wonderful power of keeping still in any position you find yourself placed in, and that is one of the most difficult powers for an actress to acquire,—and what several of our best fail in."

"Then do you think I might really become a successful actress?"

"Yes, at one of the fashionable theatres. Your difficulty is that I do not believe you would take at all at one of the inferior theatres, where most actresses have to commence their career. For your beauty would only be appreciated properly by the refined, and your beauty is your great card. Your face alone ought to make your fortune."

Then an expression of annoyance passed over Florence's face. "I do not wish to trade upon my face," she said.

"Why not? It is at all events an honest

trade, for your face is an honest face to the best of my knowledge, and constant intercourse with those whose beauty is eked out by adventitious aids, has made me somewhat of an adept at discovering anything of the kind. Why should not you trade upon your face? God gave it you for your good. I know a poet who will not make merchandise of his poetry, because forsooth he will not sell God-given thoughts for mere money, and I knew a singer once, who would not traffic with his voice. But now he is wiser," he added with a smile, "and will engage himself to sing anything for any man over and over again, till he is as much of a machine as any enlightened public can desire, so long at least as that public will pay him a fair price. Yes, I am come to that now, I can talk about the price of my singing just as if it was so much calico I disposed of by the yard, or in the piece all at the buyer's pleasure."

But though Augustus Stevens talked

thus philosophically, he did not convince Florence all at once; she waited, and waited, and thought about it, till she got Fanny's next letter; then she delayed no longer. "It is not for myself," she thought, "I could bear poverty, if it were only for myself, but I must help Fanny. She says she does not see how they can ever come home again, and yet the climate is already affecting Harry, and what will become of their child, if Harry sells out, and they take to settling in Mauritius, as he now talks of doing? Besides if he is not equal to the regimental work, how can he be equal to the hard work settling entails upon a man without money? No, if I can win a fortune it must be wrong in me not to do so, by my face, or in any other way, so long as it is not wrong, and after all there is no sin in becoming an actress."

So then Florence told Mrs. Cholmondeley that she had made up her mind, and Mrs. Cholmondeley after a little

became reconciled to the idea, and only begged her to wait for Augustus Stevens' advice, and also to see if he could not get her an introduction to the manager of some good theatre. This Augustus Stevens immediately promised to do, and Florence now begged that it might not be for her under her own name, for as she meant to consult no relation about the step she was going to take, she did not wish further to provoke anybody by dragging the name of Berkeley through such dust as of necessity attaches to the boards of a theatre. Then the three laid their heads together, and concocted the name of Lucia Lavington, and having procured an introduction under that name, Florence declined the offer of Augustus Stevens' protection, and went alone to the New Theatre, and spoke and acted much as the manager himself described to Percy Gordon. Only no one could describe, as no one who had not felt it could imagine the heart-sickening which

she felt as she moved to the door, saying those simple yet powerful words (very powerful as she said them so sadly, yet so calmly, with the calmness of despair) "Rather starvation," knowing that all the feelings of a lady bade her relinquish a project, which she had gone through so much agony before bringing herself to entertain, and to which she therefore clung now with a pertinacity proportionate to the agony gone through before.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MY NATURE IS SUBDUED TO WHAT IT WORKS IN."

FLORENCE BERKELEY had endured a good deal before she had ever succeeded in seeing the manager. Augustus Stevens had warned her against going on those busy treasury days, Friday and Saturday, when managers are hard to get hold of, and not always in the best of humours, even when they can be caught for a five minutes or so, and he had also procured her a letter of introduction to the manager of the New Theatre, which, having yet its reputation to make, was the most likely theatre to welcome a new star; but after all, who,

that has ever gone to a theatre, ignorant of its ways and yet with a set purpose to see the manager, does not know how hard it is to translate that purpose into action?

Florence went about one, which she had been told was the most likely time to find the manager, and presenting herself very shyly at the awful front door, was politely requested to go round to the stage entrance in a neighbouring street.

"You can't miss it," said the box-seller, who was very polite, (an agreeable surprise to Florence, who had been under the delusion that people about theatres were necessarily forward and impertinent,) but who had apparently too much business on his hands to care to waste words needlessly. "You can't miss it; there's a lamp," he said.

Florence thought that there were many lamps in the streets of London, but he said she could not miss it, so she wandered round

the outside of the Theatre, quite losing sight of it for a little time, and just when she was thinking she could not possibly ever come upon it again in that direction, she saw a door with a lamp over it, on which was written in certainly quite unmistakable letters, "Stage Entrance." There the porter was slightly less complaisant than the box-seller had been, still very respectful, but perhaps a trifle surly, as if it was his business more to keep out intruders, than to let in any one, and as if he sometimes had a hard job of it.

"You must go round to the front door, if you want Mr. Garrick," he said.

"I have been there," replied poor Florence, "and I was told to come here."

"He is not here," said the porter.

Then she went round to the front entrance again, to see if she could make anything of the box-seller. He was very obliging, really very obliging, though he seemed also very sleepy, and had a look of

being up late at night, oftener than quite suited him.

"Mr. Garrick is not here," he said, "did not they know where he was at the other door?"

"No, they said I was to come here if I wanted to see him."

"He is not here," said the box-seller, just as the porter had said before him; then as he guessed how vexed the young lady must be by this announcement—he could not see her face for she had her veil down, but he instinctively guessed how discouraged she must be, for he saw a good deal of the kind of thing—he added, kindly, though still a little sleepily, "he may be out, or he may be about the stage. They ought to know at the other door, he has not passed out this way, and he came in only half an hour ago."

"Then do you think I had better go back to the other door, and ask?"

"They ought to know there," said the

box-seller, and then Florence went back through those puzzling streets again.

"Mr. Garrick is not in the front part of the house," she said, "and the—the gentleman there—" she wondered much what she ought to call him, but as she was evidently speaking to his inferior, she hoped this term would only sound perhaps a trifle over-polite in the porter's ears, "the gentleman there said he thought you would know whether he was on the stage, or where he was."

"I don't know; I never saw him pass in," said the porter.

"He came in by the front door, I believe, but don't you know where he is now? Could not you go and see?" she added timidly.

There were two bearded men standing by the porter, who had come apparently much on the same errand as herself, for they too looked discouraged, and as if they were waiting somewhat hopelessly, and

without knowing quite what to do. They seemed as if they would willingly have helped her, if they could, but of course they could not, and the porter was apparently equally unable, for he also seemed willing to help her now, if he could, though still in the same surly sort of way.

"No, I can't go and see," he said. "You see I must not leave this door, or else I could," and he put a chair against the door, and went and peered up the little staircase as if he meant to go and see notwithstanding, but he came back after a minute or two, true to his post. "There may be somebody passing in presently, and then I could send a message. Would you like to send up your card? Have you an appointment with Mr. Garrick?"

"No, I have no appointment," and Florence began to wish she had made one. Augustus Stevens had strongly recommended her to do so, but in this she had not followed his advice, feeling as if she

had no right to demand any of that time from a manager, which must always be so over-occupied, seeing it was only for her own ends she wanted it. "I have a letter for Mr. Garrick," she said.

"Somebody is sure to be passing in soon," said the porter, "and then I can send it up."

But it did not seem that anyone was going to pass in, and Florence felt faint and weary, and did not like standing there in that little back street, in company with the porter and the two bearded men, so after a few minutes, she said: "I don't think there seems to be anybody going in. Perhaps I had better go round to the other door again."

"You see they are all at rehearsal," said the porter, "and it is a stiff piece they are learning. Very likely Mr. Garrick is on the stage, but if you will leave your letter I will send it up presently."

Then Florence gave her letter to the

porter, and went back to the front entrance, and waited patiently there, the box-seller politely offering her a chair. He was very good-natured, sleepy though he was, and he seemed to be quite sorry for her, that she had not yet seen Mr. Garrick.

"You see he is always in and out," he said, "it is very difficult to see him unless you have made an appointment with him. But I will just go and see if he is anywhere above." Then he walked across the hall, and whistled up a pipe, and after a few minutes there was an answering whistle down the pipe. "No, he is not anywhere in this part," said the box-seller, coming back again, "he may be on the stage, or he may have gone out to luncheon. He mostly does go out to luncheon, and it is about lunch-time now."

Then Florence sat down and waited, and watched the people who went in and out. First there came a weariful woman, evidently a widow, who pushed open one of

the great swing doors, and then seemed to lose all courage to advance further, and stood still in the doorway, revealing clearly how thin and transparent the poor old black dress had become, and what a scanty little petticoat was all she had underneath. Her hair was grey, and there were many lines of care and sorrow in her face. "One of the melancholy cases of reduced circumstances that one is always hearing about," thought Florence, as the poor widow woman at last came forward with head bent down, and a cringing walk that seemed to apologise at every step she advanced for the liberty she took in being there at all. A few whispered words to the box-seller, and then the two went together, and the box-seller called up the long speaking trumpet, and in a few minutes the answer came, which he repeated to the poor widow woman, and then she went away with a face out of which at least half the wrinkles had disappeared, and a carriage more erect

than anyone could have credited her with a few minutes before. Florence could not help rejoicing with her in her joy, and yet the sight of this widow woman left her more miserable than she had been before. It was not surely likely, was it, that two people would be sent away rejoicing from the New Theatre in one morning? and as she felt a sinking at her heart, she thought sorrowfully that there were others, who cared more about the success of their mission than even she did.

The next person that passed through the hall was a lady in black silk, who descended slowly the grand staircase from the theatre itself, and then stood in dignified impatience waiting for her carriage to drive round from the side door. To Florence it seemed that there was a great deal of confusion between these two doors, and they were so far apart, she began to wonder how much time was wasted in going from one to the other. The box-seller was very deferen-

tial indeed to this lady; he attended on her, and threw open the great swing doors for her, and let down the steps of her carriage when at last it did arrive, and arranged a dust cloak over her dress, and then as he came back and passed by Florence, still waiting patiently in the hall, he told her who it was, mentioning a name great in the theatrical world.

"Really!" she replied, trying to look grateful for the information, and interested by it, but her heart failed her more and more. What had she to do with a theatre, that employed such actresses as this one, who had just passed before her, an actress who looked so very like a lady, and so thoroughly a woman of the world, not at all Florence's idea of an actress? There was no fire about her, none of the theatrical air that was so apparent in Augustus Stevens, no jauntiness even. Would all the others be like her?

Then she turned and looked at a collec-

tion of coloured photographs, framed and hanging up behind her. There was no likeness there of the grand star she had seen pass out but now ; but there were likenesses of men as harlequins, and with gigantic false foreheads and equally preposterous noses, and she looked at these with a sort of sickening. Could it ever be her fate to act with such as these, and was it this that she was so desiring now ? There were likenesses also of young actresses, one dressed as a French soldier, smoking a cigar, and at the same time playing on a drum, with a tiny cap stuck in the most knowing little manner possible on the pretty curly head, and of another wearing clothes so curtailed at both extremities, and of such flimsy materials as Florence would have thought only suitable to a ballet at the Alhambra, and not likely to be met with in a steady-going theatre, and there were likenesses of others, or the same people, in all sorts of costumes, but these that have been mentioned were per-

haps the most striking, and in all these photographs the actresses were always smiling, and they all looked very jaunty, wonderfully jaunty.

"I am afraid I can never make an actress," thought Florence, and all the while men were coming in and out; young men, who looked like officers coming in in pairs, and going away chuckling at their own success in having obtained just the very places they wished for; business men, who looked as if they wished to give their families a treat; other business men, who seemed to wish for a treat themselves; and again a third class of business men, who had no thought but of business, and after a few hurried words with the box-seller, went away again in haste. And people came out from the theatre too. Florence did not know if they were actors or not, but at last one man passed out with a bow to the box-seller, a bow so sweeping and yet so dignified, a bow that seemed to her so certainly

to have been generally performed before the footlights, with a cloak over one shoulder, and a grandly plumed hat to aid the general effect, that, the box-seller being near at hand at the moment, she could not resist asking him who this man was. "Was he not surely some great actor?"

"Oh no," said the box-seller, "that is the stage-dresser. I don't think you will ever see an actor with whiskers," he added, after a few moments' reflection.

Then while he was speaking to her a young girl came down the staircase, a girl who seemed very much at home about the theatre, and not at all hurried or nervous, like the people who came into it from the street, but still a girl very quietly dressed in a short black and white striped dress, with again a black and white striped petticoat underneath, and indeed with everything about her either black or white, not at all Florence's idea of an actress, any more than the grand lady had been, who had come

down the staircase before her, and yet, looking at her closely, Florence saw that, considering the class of life to which this girl probably belonged, there was a little air about her, that at least she was very different to a housemaid, though certainly nothing like so airified as half the "young ladies" in the grand Regent Street shops.

"That is Miss Annie Rogers," said the box-seller, "that was her picture you were looking at in the dress of a French soldier."

Florence looked at Miss Annie Rogers, looked at the blue eyes, that, though quite quiet and composed now, looked as if they could laugh well when they tried; looked at the brilliant complexion and dark brown hair.

"She is very pretty on the stage, is she not?" she said.

"Yes, very," said the box-seller indifferently. He evidently did not trouble himself much about that, but again he was compassionate. "She only gets six pounds a

week, and Miss Polly Hopkins gets nearly twice as much, but that is because she has got a London reputation, and Miss Annie Rogers has only acted in the provinces."

Again Florence desponded, but she could not bear to show how low her hopes had sunk by this time.

"Where does she come from?" she asked.

"Oh, she is Irish, but she has acted in the north of England somewhere or other. Are you thinking of going on the stage yourself?" asked the box-seller in a friendly tone of interest, and more in the manner of an equal than he had as yet assumed. Then, as Florence Berkeley hesitated for an instant before she could bring herself to answer, "Yes," he coloured scarlet, evidently thinking he had made a great mistake, and probably offended a young lady, who had no idea whatever of becoming an actress, but was at the New Theatre on quite other business. He seemed to wish to efface the recollection of his blunder as quickly as pos-

sible, but evidently he could not understand what other business a young lady could possibly have, that made it worth her while to wait so long at the New Theatre.

"Some people do make great fortunes on the stage," he said. "There is Mr. Toole, he gets twelve thousand a year, I believe, and Mr. Kean, he used to get forty pounds a night. But it is when they go starring that the actors make the most money; then they go shares with the manager who has them down, and generally they take the biggest share, only it is no use coming up to town with nothing but a provincial reputation. If I had a relation who wanted to go upon the stage, I should recommend her to go and take lessons of some body first, that is the best way of beginning. There is Mr.——"

At this moment there was one of the unearthly whistles down the pipe, and he broke off. How Florence hated those theatre calls, they made her tremble from

head to foot, and sent cold shudders through her.

"It is Mr. Garrick," said the box-seller coming back from the pipe. "He wanted to know if you were here still. He will be down in a moment now. I thought he would be down directly if he were upon the stage, for Miss Annie Rogers is on in the last scene."

Then he retired into the cell from which he sold his boxes, and in a few moments Florence saw a tall gentlemanly-looking man descending the staircase, and supposed this was Mr. Garrick. He was very apologetic about having kept her so long waiting, and asked her if she had ever been at his theatre, and seemed very anxious to give her a box on that or any other night, but Florence did not want a box at all. The last thing she felt inclined for was to see a play acted by others, now that she had just made up her mind to become an actress herself, if only she could. The pos-

sibility of this seemed very doubtful, Mr. Garrick was very civil, but he appeared decidedly in a hurry, and as she did not seem to care about saying whether she would have a box or not, so he did not seem to care about saying, whether he would have her to act or not. At last, as he told Percy Gordon, he offered to her to take a boy's part, and Florence, with that likeness of the young actress she had just seen in French soldier's uniform still fresh in her memory, looked sadly at him, and clasping her hands to still the aching of her heart, turned softly and slowly away, saying only, "Rather starvation."

She was obliged to speak decidedly, for she had brought herself by this time to wish so very vehemently to be allowed to act. Then she bowed to him, and saying, "Good-morning, I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time," was about to go away, when just as she reached the door and was beginning to push it open, Mr.

Garrick recovered sufficiently from the effect of her words to call her back, and request her to repeat them. Florence could not understand what he meant at first, and when she did understand, the bitterness of the iron did really enter into her soul; she knew from that moment that it was a professional she was to be, and from that moment she never forgot it again. All the pleasure that she might possibly ever have taken in acting, passed away for her then and for ever. She repeated her words, she repeated her tone, she repeated her gesture, and to do so she repeated the feelings that had first called them forth, but the effort was too great for her. What she did then would have been a *tour de force* for the most practised actress, and she was quite new to acting, perfectly new to it, for as Captain Lorraine said of her the first time he saw her acting: "She was always so natural, the very last person one could fancy acting well." Florence accom-

plished her *tour de force*, but she fainted under it; only when she recovered from that fainting fit she understood, that she was to be allowed to become an actress. She had gained her wish, but notwithstanding it was with a heavy heart that Florence Berkeley walked away that day from the New Theatre.

She had written no word to Fanny of her new project, just as she had written no word to her of the hardships she had gone through before. Florence's was essentially a reserved as well as a proud nature, and while Fanny had so many money troubles of her own, Florence could not have borne to add any unnecessary sorrow to her sister's lot by telling her of her own, even had she wished to tell them. But now that she had succeeded in finding what promised to be a way of relieving them all from their difficulties, Florence hastened to write to Fanny, and did not only send her an affectionate cheery letter, such as she generally

managed to write her, whatever her own feelings were at the time, but in this letter she begged her to persuade Major Bolton not to sell out, but to come home as soon as he could, if the climate was affecting his health, at all events whenever he did come home, to do so without any fear of the consequences, for she thought she should be in a position to help them, at whatever time they arrived.

"So little Flo is going to make some grand marriage," said Fanny when she read this mysterious letter, "dear me, how glad I am! Do you know, Harry, I have never been able to get that child and her pale face off my mind all the time I have been out here? I have always felt as if we deserted her, leaving her to her fate when we came out here without her."

"It is little enough good it would have done bringing her out here with us," said Major Bolton grimly, "and if she is going to make a grand match as you say, I don't

see how I can be beholden to my wife's sister's husband."

But after that he talked no more of selling out, to Fanny's great relief.

Meanwhile Florence did not gain much money at first, she had to take very inferior parts for a long time, for it is always a difficult matter to introduce a new star into a theatre company, even when the star has already starred it in more than one quarter of the world. When the star is also a *débutante*, unknown to fame, it is an immensely tedious process, for actresses' jealousies are proverbial, and it does not do to offend the many in order to gratify the one. During all this time Florence enjoyed none of the luxuries of a private dressing-room, nor any immunity from the flattery closely allied to insult, which she afterwards secured to herself. It was now that her face acquired the cold, hard expression it never afterwards altogether forgot again; it was now that her lip learnt to curl in

scorn of the officious gallantries of men, who thought they did her honour by their notice. She acquired patience after a time, but at first she complained bitterly of these to Mrs. Cholmondeley.

"I used to think it dreadful when I was only a young lady, nothing more, now I am an actress it is too horrible. What would any nice man think of a girl, if he knew what disgusting things she had to listen to from other men?"

"He would knock the other men down, I fancy, without stopping to think at all," said Mrs. Cholmondeley drawing the agitated girl down to herself, as she lay upon the sofa. "I wish I could do it for you, dearest, and Augustus would be but too happy, if he only thought you wished it, though it might blight his whole prospects for life. But then it would blight yours too, and you have got to make a fortune, you know, dear."

"Yes, I have got to make a fortune, and

so I must just listen to whatever they are pleased to say to me. But what right have they to pay me such horrid loathsome compliments? When I was a young lady I often wondered about it. They don't mean them, they know they don't, and they know you know they don't. What right have they to say them?"

"The right of might, I suppose."

"That is all very well, Magdalene, but it is wretched. Oh, it breaks my heart, and I think it will make me mad some day."

"Oh my dearest, dearest Florence, I hope not. But you are so calm generally, how can you talk of going mad?"

"Because I am not calm, really. Oh, Magdalene, sometimes I think I am a dreadful hypocrite, for I know I seem calm, and all the time I am as wild and passionate—as passionate as possible. This acting brings it all to the surface, and makes me know it. Oh, it excites me so, that it is almost more than I can do even to appear

calm, I feel like a volcano that might explode any moment."

But it was seldom Florence talked in this way, generally she was very calm and quiet. She did not live in the little cottage now, she had taken a lodging for herself in London, in the East End, among the poor people she had known before, and whom she was now strong enough to visit again; not particularly near the New Theatre certainly, but still a great deal nearer than the little cottage would have been. And after a time Mrs. Cholmondeley found herself lonely in the little cottage without her, and took lodgings in London too, lodgings which served as a house of call for the rising actress, who was known as Miss Lucia Lavington at Mrs. Cholmondeley's, while at her own lodgings she still continued to be known as Miss Berkeley. Thus none of the poor people she visited, nor any of those whom she was in this way brought in contact with, neither Father Thornton her one-

time lover, nor the good low-church vicar, nor the clever young doctor, more capable of seeing through a mill-stone than most people, and all three in their different ways much interested in Miss Berkeley, ever for a moment connected her in their minds with the actress already rising into celebrity at the great West End—words full of awful and mysterious meaning to the out-and-out East-Ender.

At Mrs. Cholmondeley's lodgings the people knew Florence as Miss Lavington, and they knew she was an actress, and they all, Jane especially, liked her, but they did not think much of her otherwise, or consider her in any way distinguished, for the theatre at which Florence appeared was an almost exclusively fashionable one, and when Mrs. Cholmondeley died, Florence had only appeared twice as Blanche Beaumarchais, the character in which she made her reputation, so the fame of it had not reached them yet.

That was an awful time for Florence,

when she first played the part of heroine; for though she had acted Ophelia before, that had only been as a substitute, the actress to whom the part properly belonged having fallen ill. It was as Blanche Beaumarchais that she first really appeared as the heroine of a drama. Then when fortune and fame were at last secured to her, if she could only live to enjoy them, her best and truest friend, her only friend indeed for the last three years, lay a-dying, and Florence had to tear herself from Mrs. Cholmondeley's bedside to go through long wearisome rehearsals, and after that, worse still, to win the plaudits of the multitude, and be the idol of the hour. No wonder she put pathos into her acting, and drew tears from her audience, no wonder that she failed utterly, failing there alone, in looking sufficiently happy in the last two scenes. Those first days and nights of her success were awful days and nights to her, and then came Lord Bulmer with his proffers of friendship, making her wonder if it would

not have been better had she been less proud, and thrown herself and Fanny upon his kindness, instead of daring the bold step she had taken. But she knew whatever he might have done for herself, he would not have helped Fanny, and so that was her consolation for those months of bondage she was yet to undergo before she would be free again to make her choice. Then too came Augustus Stevens, whom, despite all the eccentricities of his manner, she had learnt to like and to respect; he came with his noble offering of love, and humble petition for leave to extend to her his protection, and Florence had to refuse both, and yet, though she had never thought of it before, she knew directly he told her so, that the little man really loved her, and felt as much pain when she rejected him, as if he had been such a man as she could have accepted. It was an additional grief to her, especially as in those first days of mourning for his lost sister, and while the preparations were being made for her fune-

ral, she had to be much thrown with him, and the sorrow they shared together made her grieve the more for the pain she had been forced to inflict.

Florence often wondered afterwards how she lived through those first days of her success. In truth the acting helped her, for while it lasted it carried her out of herself, and when it was over it left her neither strength nor energy even for thought, and she sank unresisting into a lethargy. Augustus Stevens was the first person to rouse her from this lethargy. He came to see her, and he warned her that unless she wished it known that Florence Berkeley and Lucia Lavington were one and the same, she must hasten to move from a place where she was already known by the first name, and go to one where she would start fair with the last.

"Yes," said Florence, "of course you are quite right. Now that I shall have no house of call, all notes and messages from the theatre must be sent to me here, I sup-

pose, and of course that would not do, but I shall be sorry to leave this place and all the people I know so well."

"You could often come back and see them without anybody's being a bit the wiser, and this house is no longer a fit place for you. As the first actress of the day, and you will soon be acknowledged as such, you ought to live in a place where you would not be ashamed of any friends you might make coming to see you."

"I shall make no new friends."

"Old friends, then."

"No old friends will ever come to see me, I hope," she said, speaking in that hard, cold manner that had grown upon her, since men had made themselves loathsome to her by their flattery.

Nevertheless she did change her house, and went, as Augustus Stevens advised, further west, though by no means west yet, to a quiet, respectable-looking house in a quiet, respectable Square, at easy distance

from the New Theatre. It was there that she gave Percy Gordon her address, and when she wrote it down for him, she felt glad that she had followed Augustus Stevens's advice; she could hardly have asked Percy to come and see her in her old lodgings, and now as she had come across him, and as he took her being an actress so quietly, and called her so naturally Miss Lavington, she thought she should like to see him again. After all there is a pleasure in seeing old friends, even to people who have made themselves stone towards all the rest of the world, and Florence had not really made herself stone, she had only tried to a certain degree to become such, not to all the world, but to a few people, who called themselves gentlemen, and her an actress.

END OF VOL. II.

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